

THE YOKE OF PITY  
(L'ORDINATION)



JULIEN BENDA



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# THE YOKE OF PITY

(L'ORDINATION)

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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**PART I**  
**ASCENT**

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## I

THE boy, Pierre, went up to bed and they were left alone, as they had been on several evenings before, at the bottom of the garden. They talked a little about their afternoon's excursion and the beauty of the night and then were silent.

They were silent for a long time. . . . They began to feel increasingly conscious of the oppression of their mutual acquiescence in the silence. . . . The lights of the hotel were put out. Each was aware that the other had seen them go out and made no move to return. They felt that they were sinking down into complicity. . . . Their hands touched and their eyes met in mingled love and reproach, as though each of the lovers were reproaching the other with the eternity of time during which they had not recognised each other.

He took her back to the door of the hotel, feeling and respecting her desire for inward

preparation in delay for their utter union. He loved her desire and the respect he had for it, for he loved rather the elegance of love than love itself.

Next day, they were walking together on the hill, thrilling with the kiss which they made no attempt to recall, drinking in their profound communion through the most trivial acts of sharing, happy in their promise of love, happy, yet not joyous.

They passed down the slope leading to the garden and sat halfway up the hill. For several minutes together she mused. Then she said:

“I am afraid, Félix . . . I am afraid lest I should not satisfy you. . . . You belong to a brilliant world. . . . Your mother, your sisters, are smart women . . . the women who loved you before were like them. . . . But I am just an ordinary bourgeoisie. . . .”

He said:

“I hate all that, my heart is not in it. I have found only lies in it: lies of talent, lies

of beauty, lies of love. . . . Only during the past month have I found truth, Madeleine, only since I have known you. I love your modest way of dressing. It is so true. . . .”

So, it seemed to him, his will overcame his habits and fervently he came to the religion of the humble.

That day she told him all her life. She told him of her sad childhood: her cold, proud mother: her elder sister's jealousy, her father, who alone had loved her, her father whom she had lost so soon. . . . She told him of her marriage to a man much older than herself, a pompous disillusioned man, who was galled by any kind of happiness and resentful at her youth. . . . Then of her first child, still-born. . . . Then of the boy Pierre, and the perpetual irritation he was to her in his resemblance to his father . . . and of the hostility of her husband's relations. . . . She told him of the silence, the emptiness, the fast captivity of her life.

She raised her eyes:

“ Ah!” she said, laying her hand on his arm, “ You are the only creature in the whole world who has ever shed a tear for me.”

He made her tell him more and began to discover the charm of compassion.

At night, when all were asleep, she stood trembling behind her door, waiting for him. . . . He came. . . . She fell into his arms. He pressed her to him, and not the grace and beauty of her body moved him so much as its surrender. . . .

He looked round her room. . . . He loved her simple things lying folded on a chair, her little common watch hanging above the bed.

So, until morning, they drank the poison.

Each night he came to her. . . . They laughed at the pains they now took to be together less during the daytime. . . . Their attraction for each other gained with use.

He felt that, and, making Madeleine feel it too, he attached her to himself.

Often they would talk of their first kiss, their first coming together. They would say how they had never thought of it as a new thing, or as a surprise, or as marking any difference in themselves. . . . Their love had wished to have no beginning. . . . And their hands had joined: neither had taken the other. . . .

So they tried to do away with the idea of a definite act, to lose consciousness in the indeterminate.

The boy, Pierre, fell ill. She did not go out for two days. He asked after him almost hourly. . . . Together with hands clasped they leaned over the child as he lay asleep. . . . He enjoyed the absence in himself of male egoism, and sharing in the sorrows of the woman he had taken. He took his taste for this elegance for love.



They returned to Paris.

Gravely, piously he set about binding relations with her and arranging for the construction of the intrigue.

He began by breaking as much as possible with everything that was not related to Madeleine.

He held more aloof than ever from his own people, avoiding their dinners and teas and jests and chatter about actors and tailors. . . . He hated his sisters and their craze for pleasure and being seen in society. . . . He thought he detested their luxury. He tried not to see how Madeleine's simplicity disconcerted him even more in the town than in the hills.

There was a woman waiting for him to whom he had not written all summer. He broke with her, brutally, against all tradition, without even taking the trouble to keep her friendly towards him. As she was rich and

popular he told himself that she could not suffer.

He left his friends. Their ambition worried him. Their love-making disgusted him.

He flung aside his papers, his would-be serious books, and lost all interest in public life and society. Such things seemed to him to be but a theft from love. He wanted to believe that love is nothing if it be not everything. . . . How he despised the worldly love that does not engross the whole of a man's mind and heart! . . .

He gave up a flat he had outside Paris, for other women had been to it. He wished to receive her in a new setting. . . . On the few days when she could not come to him he went and lived there, wrote there, dreamed there, sought to find her in the choice of a piece of stuff, the arrangement of the flowers. . . . And on the days when she had visited him, sometimes in the evening he would return alone, once more in the disordered room to taste the mingling of their souls, to sleep

where she had lain, to feel still that she was there. So afraid was he of too soon returning to consciousness of himself apart from her.

He bound her to him by the joys she had in him, the joys he desired her to find, by the need she had of him, the need he desired her to have. She was bound to him by the supreme surrender to which she agreed and by her own betrayal of her sex in the confession of her desires. She was bound to him by her immodesty, by her desire to taste the fulness of it. . . . He aggravated the binding power of the audacities of love, by his subtlety in finding meanings in them. . . . Also they explored and exploited the eternity of Love; and they did not escape the feeling of its likeness to Death. . . .

She allowed him to come to her house. . . . He tried to ignore the awkwardness of his first visit; he tried to persuade himself that he loved the little, dark, low-ceilinged



flat, and the little people who lived their narrow existence in it. . . . For her her prison was flooded with sunlight. She could not endure it unless he came often. . . . He calmly accepted the need she had of him and knew perfectly how his calmness bound her to him.

She preserved a certain amount of coquetry, a certain taste for feeling her power over men . . . and also she kept to herself a certain secret, a few little old love-passages of which she told him nothing. . . . Gently, without asking her for anything, he led her to surrender of all these things. . . . So he stripped her of her pride, the one thing that could support her if ever he should cease to love her; so he left her with no corner of her soul that she could call her own, and crept into and filled her whole being. . . . "Think," she would say, tremblingly, "think what it would be if you were to come to me one day and tell me that I must fall back into myself. . . ." He was aware of his responsibility. He loved it.

What amazing skill he had in his fidelity to her! With what artistry he indulged in self-denunciation for his acts of omission, his little thefts from his beloved, thefts concerning which he knew cowardly that she could say nothing,—having no power of analysis, no mastery of words,—thefts also which one knows must hurt her! With what artistry he denied himself the least pleasure in pleasing others! . . . All other men, all other women seemed unfaithful to him.

He enjoyed the sensation of being insensible to all other women. He cultivated his absolute absorption in the Only One.

With what subtle ingenuity did he free himself altogether of independence! He told her everything he did, everything he thought. . . . And in the evenings he would see men and women asking those whom they believed to be their lovers what they had been doing during the day! Poor men and women! As

if your lover ever waited to be asked to tell his doings!

Often she would deplore the fact that he was so young—hardly two years older than she—and she would worry about the future. . . . In ten years she would be thirty-five. . . . But he would love her still! And he would always succeed in making her share his faith. And he loved the feeling that this faith of his own creation bound him more closely to her than ever.

So he sank deep into fidelity, into dependence, into an insoluble relationship.

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Summer came. She went to stay with her boy in a village in the forest of \*\*\*. He stayed a few miles away to throw his people off the scent. . . . In the evening, at curfew, he would steal out and go across the forest and sit down under the trees: at a given signal he would go up to her house and she

would open her window. . . . He would return at dawn and sleep until midday, sunk deep into a drowsiness that still bathed him in her atmosphere.

Ah! the first time he came to her! How joyful he was—walking along the open road, far, far away from casinos and palatial hotels—to feel that through her he was discovering space, the wide air, the open sky, his own strength, his youth, the upward impulse of his being! How joyful he was—hastening to the woman through the mighty forest, seeming mightier in its darkness and silence—to feel that through her he was discovering a kind of new consciousness, unknown in the polite world, the consciousness of love linked to the ordering of the universe! And, when he reached her room, and in enchantment moved about the little room that she had made so living with such little things—a piece of stuff on the table or a fan on the wall—how joyful he was to feel that through her he was discovering woman, her art, her skill

in invention. . . . What could he know of the genius of woman from the women of his world who found everything ready to their hands? . . . —How much more closely were they drawn together on that night of reunion. They were more dear to each other in the audacity of their meeting, in their unusual surroundings, in their defiance of the world: they were more united in the mystery of it all, in their adoration of that mystery . . . above all they were bound in the worship of the Bond.

Fearful at heart she would watch him go away in the morning, in the cold and the rain. . . . One evening he came two hours late. He had lost his way. A pile of wood that marked a turning had been removed. He found her almost beside herself. . . . He was more nearly drawn to her through the anxiety he caused her.

How thoroughly he felt, and wished to feel, the peculiar conjunction that binds lovers in

the presence of nature; the abolition of their social personalities, the eternal reminder of their duality; the truth of their mutual attraction, now that it was freed from the excitements of the town; and how he felt the fleeting nature of their union and its eternity . . . a simple flashing into consciousness of the infinite desire that was written in everything about them.

One day,—a short time after their arrival—she was able to escape. She came to meet him in the woods. . . . They sat side by side on the great trunk of a dead tree lying by the road. She put her arm round her lover's neck:

“Darling,” she said softly, “You don’t find this life boring? Alone all day long! . . . And you don’t dislike the little room you have taken over there, do you? It is such a change for you. . . . You used to spend the summer in such gay places. . . .”

He said:

“I am happy. I am not alone during the

day. I live in memory and in expectation. . . . I love my little room and my simple life. . . . And love can only grow strong in austerity."

She adored the memory of their smallest happiness, and would piously preserve a scrap of paper or a flower that they had gathered together. "You understand," she would say. . . . "Other men laugh at our childishness!" And he would scorn such men.

She fell ill, and was forced to keep indoors, and to take the greatest care of herself. He would come in the evening, when she was left alone, and sit by her bedside, and console her and tend her, and watch himself rising from love to devotion, and take a subtle, proud joy in forgetting the attraction of her body and helping her and setting up their communion in sorrow above their sex-antagonism. Often she would ask him to lie down by her side and she would sleep in his arms. . . . And more strongly than ever he was

bound to her by the veneration which he found in himself for her frailty, her slumber; by the acrid delight he was able to find in living without her for her sake.

November. They were still in the country. He came to her now over the river of dead leaves. . . . They clung to each other more closely to defy the death of their woods.

They had great fires which lit up all the room. . . . And, pressed close together, they would dream how yonder, in the town, there were dinners and theatres, and triumph and hatred.

Came their last night. The last time that he would come to her room. . . . She had packed up. There was no gay cloth on the table, no fan on the wall. . . . He clung to her. So "their" room was dead, their room that had held five months of their youth. . . . Their youth would stay there, lost in the forest, eternally, while they—they would be elsewhere, would pass and die . . . and



coarse peasants would sleep in the room to-morrow. . . . And next year it would be let to others. . . .

He clung to her to suppress his doubts. . . . What proof had he that it had ever been?

He clung to her to ward off the future, for protection against himself. . . . Something told him that their happiness would never come again, that he would not wish it to return.

He had to go. Slowly she opened the window. He went out. Away. Often he turned and threw kisses to her. . . . Then he walked on for a long time without turning. . . . As he came to the corner he turned once more. She was still there at the window. Then blindly he rushed to her, kissed her madly, went away at a run, stifling his sobs, and never turned again.

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They returned to the town. He resumed

the mode of living of the past winter; never going into society, staying alone or with her in their flat, going to see her at her house. . . .

He became conscious of the monotony of his life. He loved it. It seemed to him to have something of the quality of a great work of art. And he was happy in Madeleine's happiness. And he was proud of his love. Proud of his seriousness. Of his faithfulness. Proud of being necessary. . . .

## II

ONE morning Félix woke up about six o'clock. It was June. He thought of the appointment he had made with Madeleine for the day. . . . He thought that in a few days she would be leaving for the country, and how he would go and lodge near her and resume the old mode of living that they had adopted during the previous summer: living alone with her, for several months, far away from the world. . . . But now his thoughts brought him none of the joy that he expected. Only a strange feeling. A vague uneasiness. A feeling that he did not understand, while it persisted and disturbed him. Suddenly, in a flash, the idea of his liaison stifled him with a feeling of anguish; it seemed to him to be like an absolute, everlasting captivity. In terror he sat up in his bed. Did he love Madeleine less? Was his life with her oppressing him? . . . As in a flash of lightning

he saw the hugeness of such a calamity and dismissed the idea, not without perceiving that his chief reason for doing so was that it was too horrible. . . . It was insane! Can a man cease to love like that? Suddenly? For no reason? Oh, come! He was still the same. He was happy. . . . Now he was calm again. . . . Quite calm. . . . He began to smile at the thought of his beloved, still sleeping. She would soon be awake. And when she awoke she too would think of their meeting. . . . And suddenly he was once more filled with anguish. He had just become conscious of a frightful discord between Madeleine's eagerness for the meeting and his own feeling of repugnance.

Then, extremely agitated, he got up, drew on his clothes fumblingly in a sort of semi-consciousness which terrified him. Then he went out. He walked blindly on, swiftly, mechanically, haggardly, like a man who has just heard that some terrible misfortune has befallen him, the full extent of which he does not yet know, though know it he inevitably

must. . . . Yes. His life with her had oppressed him, had been oppressing him for a long time. He could no longer disguise it from himself. What had just happened to him was the breaking of a calamity which for many months had lain dormant to his unconscious suffering, which he had refused to admit to himself. . . . But what he now felt—and with what anguish!—was the impossibility of changing his life, the vast network of subtle and firm ties in which he had enmeshed himself, while he had cut himself off from the power to break free, or the right to do so; the utter need of himself that it had delighted him to create in the woman, and the entire confidence, the absolute dependence, the disintegration of her pride, the disgust with the world, the eternal love which he had taught her, love making no provision for change, and the terrible union of souls that of the past two years he had forced upon her, an union which she could not do without, and could not look for in any other man. . . . And he must smile and smile in such a prison,

appear as happy in it as on their first day. . . . And this was to go on for the rest of his life. For never, never would he dare to speak. . . . And he went on walking frenziedly, either because he was trying to divert his thoughts by movement or because in it he found some solace for his sense of captivity.

He walked on and on. . . . And the idea of being in prison waxed greater and greater, increased and multiplied, became absolute, his one idea, the thought of the approaching meeting, of dining at her house on the morrow, of some other engagement in two days' time. . . . And the same thing all over again during the following week. . . . Then the summer. Alone with her. Only with her, hypnotised, stationary, with her. For months together. . . . And nature solemnising everything! . . . And the nights with her! Silence and the night! The tedious oppressive love of the woman he no longer loved, made overwhelming, made eternal, by the silence and the night! Absolute bondage! It was too frightful. He would find some excuse. He

would not go. Then he thought of the dresses she had made for the summer, for him. She had shown him them. She had been so happy. . . . He would go! He knew that he would go! . . . More frenziedly still he walked on and on, as though he hoped to wear out the power of his uneasiness by moving, moving. . . .

He walked on and on. . . . For a moment, worn out, he sank on to a seat. Having less capacity for suffering, life seemed just tolerable to him. He would cling to his life with her! . . . Then, suddenly, he called to mind the image of Madeleine dressing, doing her hair, happy, gay, confiding. . . . And he could no longer bear to sit still.

He walked on and on. . . . Every now and then he would suddenly feel reassured. . . . It was idiotic! He loved her just the same! . . . Were there not a thousand reasons why he should love her? . . . But he knew the vanity of his belief. And the mere fact of his clinging to his love was sufficient assurance that it was slipping away from

him. And it seemed to him that it was slipping away from minute to minute with ever-increasing rapidity. . . . Ah! How horrible, horrible it is, he said to himself later on (for he never forgot that morning) for a man to feel that his heart is being drained dry, under his very eyes, and him to be unable to do anything.

He went walking on and on. Ten o'clock. In four hours he would see Madeleine again. Never had he been so impatient, so eager to see her again. The reason was (so he told himself) that he was thinking how, as soon as he saw her again, he would feel that he loved her just as much as ever and his nightmare would be gone. . . . The real reason—as he had to admit later on—was that he had a vague feeling that in spite of himself the fading of his love would be clear to the eyes of his beloved and he would at once feel a certain solace and relief from lying and deception.

He reached a horrible desolate place and



sank down by the roadside. . . . He wished to die. So he would avoid what had always been to him the most dreadful element in death; that it might come when he was happy. . . . When he was happy! . . . So he still thought that he could be happy? . . . He groaned under the feeling that he was still used to the idea of happiness.

He thought of all the men he knew. . . . He heard them saying, as men have done since the beginning of time: "What a pothor about nothing! You don't love her any more? Let her go." . . . And he was overcome with a new distress: the certain knowledge that he was alone in his misery, that he could talk of it to no one; and the idea that he was in some sort singular in his sorrow.

And he kept on saying to himself: "Why do I no longer love her? Why do I no longer love her? . . ." But he was acutely conscious of the puerility of his stupor and his belief in a "mystery"; he knew that there were

*reasons* why he no longer loved her, and that they were not very subtle and could easily be discovered if he would dare to look for them.

He went home, sat down to lunch but ate hardly anything. He marked the astonishment of his people and the servants. He understood that a fresh torment lay in wait for him, the effort to conceal his suffering from them. . . . He hated them for their solicitude, which was as a mirror to show him his unhappiness.

Two o'clock. He lay back on the divan, as worn out as though he had been waiting, watching for ten days, irritated by the furniture, awake, anxiously expecting Madeleine. She came in joyfully. He took her in his arms, embraced her desperately in his obscure consciousness of the hurt he was bound to deal her. She was vaguely surprised at it, for a moment. . . . She thought him pale and looking so tired! . . . He invented excuses. She sat down by his side and told him

what she had been doing during the last two days—how bored she had been, and what she had enjoyed, her smallest thought. He listened, with his arm round her waist, his eyes gazing into hers, filled with a sweet tenderness for the confidence she gave him, and he was resolved to suffer everything rather than fail her. . . . Lovingly, tenderly, she desired more. Ardently, piously he kissed her over and over again. . . .

Never had he been so passionate. But she looked at him gravely and, for the first time since she had known him, she said:

“Do you love me?”

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From that day on, in revolt or acquiescence, stinging or heart-breaking, the idea of being imprisoned never left him.

Sometimes in the country he would see a happy couple, escaping from the world, blithe

and gay in their beloved bondage; sometimes in society he would see a lover, the untroubled possessor of some beautiful smart woman, obviously independent of any need for tenderness; sometimes in a book he would find some fictitious character who went straight to his appointed end absolutely absolved from affection. . . . Anything and everything served to make him feel his slavery. . . . And he had no other consciousness except as a prisoner. And he dated all the other events of his life by that consciousness; of anything that he read or heard he always thought: It was before, or after. . . .

He tried to cheat his malady. And sometimes he escaped it. But he could not escape the sorrow of knowing that he was cheating. . . . Could he make himself believe: "I do not love her less, but differently"? He recognised his ingenuousness. . . . And again, when he saw other men, he would think: "They have all known their affections to change. And they have been able to bear it.

. . . Well, I will do as they have done." But he knew how dishonest he was in trying to believe himself to be "like them."

Every day it was a frightful torment for him to wake up.

He would awake in the happy consciousness of being young and fresh, light-hearted, free from hate, living a soft, pleasant, comfortable life. . . . And then suddenly he would feel that there was something in life that he had forgotten, that would come back to him again, that poisoned all the rest. . . . Ah, yes! I am in prison! . . . And the silence of the morning, the warm comfort of his bed, his solitude, gave him a feeling that it was absolute, that this thing would never change.

Then he would go out and restore his sense of proportion in the company of men. . . . He no longer had the spasms of sorrow that had crazed him on the first coming of the idea of his bondage. Now his sorrow was dull and monotonous, a thing that seemed

essentially enduring, like wretched surroundings, horribly, horribly bearable.

That day she came to him and lay in his arms, worn out, with eyes closed. . . . Haggardly he looked at her, terrified by the happiness she found in him.

Sometimes he tried to accept his bondage. . . . He would sacrifice himself! What did his life matter? . . . He used to go to church and try to learn the art of self-immolation. . . . He mistook his liking for the peace, the austere resonance, the great placid arches, for a disposition for self-sacrifice.

Often he accused himself of exaggeration, of romanticism, in his belief that he was "buried" and "in prison." Could he not escape, in work or through pleasure? . . . Then he would have a feeling of retrogression. For he had dreamed of the singularity of love. . . . Then he would summon up his old ideal, and, with bowed head, he would

acknowledge the necessity of desolemnising love.

Sometimes he would really escape from his unhappiness by judging it. He would think of his first tenderness with her, his first tears, the slow weaving of the net that bound him. And he would think: "None of it was true. I did not love the bond. I did not love my tears. I was following old models."

And he would dream:

"Any young man who is sensitive to all the examples of love would do as I did. He would bind fetters on himself and he would weep. The æsthetic of love is always the æsthetic of tears and bondage. . . . So much the worse for those who are not fit for it. They act on it just the same. . . . For there is no other way. Love that is free and joyous is still unpopular and despised. . . . And perhaps it is better so. . . . The æsthetic of love was made for women. They have made it for themselves. . . ."

And suddenly he would think that the delight of tears and bondage existed apart from all that, and that he had known it, that he was still enslaved by it.

Then he tried to discover why he no longer loved her. . . . Since when? . . . He probed back and back. . . .

He was overcome by a sort of dull dizziness: it seemed to him then that he had never loved her. . . .

And every day brought fresh uneasiness. . . . He was bored by the little people whom she made him meet: they hurt him now and gave him a feeling that he was unclassed. . . . He was disquieted by Madeleine's truthfulness, her honesty in not appearing to be anything but what she was, her lack of the kind of polite bluff to which he had always been accustomed. . . .

And again he was irritated by the frugality of Madeleine's life, the frugality of her house,



her furniture, her establishment, her clothes. . . . And yet he knew many others like hers, people living frugal lives—and they amused him—artists and working people. . . . But in their houses there were gaiety, carelessness, liberty. . . . While in hers there were sadness, worry, slavery . . . and her need of clinging to some one happier than herself. . . . But for the moment he did not analyse it all. He only saw that he was drifting away from the woman because of her humble life, and, as he tried to fight down his growing consciousness of the truth, so horrible in its simplicity, mad with grief and shame, he cried: “I am not going to leave her because she is not rich!”



However he was forcing his way back to freedom. Silently, laboriously, the secret process of destruction of all that bound him to her set in. He returned to society, the theatres, his friends, his books. . . .

He told her that he had been to the theatre and said that he had been taken. She forced herself to take it lightly.

She found him changed but could not say exactly how. She thought she was attaching too much importance to "impressions."

Alone with her, at her house, he would talk to her now about the plays he had seen, and about the people he knew and their gossip: he would talk about Pierre and children's minds: he would talk about music, poetry, colour, dress, and decoration. . . .

She forced herself to think that his ceasing to talk of love meant nothing.

When he was alone with her in their flat he no longer desired darkness and silence. . . . Rather he wanted daylight, the noise coming up from the street, as faint gusts of liberty. . . . Now he wished their union to be an act and not a condition. . . . And at once he would begin to talk of outside things as

though he wished at once to put their intimacy behind him. She was dying under it all, slowly. . . . She tried to think that she was attaching too much importance to "little things."

Often, when she came, she would find him reading. He would draw her to him, and made her read too, and talk, or play the piano. . . . So the day would pass. . . . And he would take her home. . . .

She tried to remember what she had been told, that the union of the body was a little thing. And their souls had met!

She would remind him of little ways he had had and had no longer: his pleasure in furnishing and in her clothes. . . . He would reply: "What would you? One can't go on being eighteen for ever. . . ." She felt that all was lost.

One day she asked him:

"You still love me just the same?" He took her in his arms and covered her with kisses. . . .

In her heart she remembered that he had not been at all surprised that she should ask him that.

. . . They would lie side by side, sinking with the dying day, each absorbed in thought, so sundered soul from soul as to make the intimacy of their bodies a mockery cruel and hard to bear. . .

One day in the country they were sitting on a little stone bridge at the end of a day which she had wanted to be happy though it had never been one of friendliness. Night was falling. He said:

"We must go home. . . . I am dining with my sister-in-law. . . . You know, she is giving a series of them."

"Ah!" she said, "You are going to all of them?"

They said no more. During the past year

he had not been to any. And he knew that she was thinking of that.

They went home slowly, silently, horribly in accord, bound together, as though they were carrying between them the coffin of their child.



He had no doubt now: she knew.

Then there began for him the worst torment of all. His heart, marvellously prepared by two years of tenderness for any outpouring, any disordered emotion, became a prey to the sharpest, the completest, the most passionate pity. He wandered through the streets the whole day long now, immured in the fixed idea of Madeleine in distress and striving to overcome her misery by the most frantic self-abasement.

He saw her sitting with her family, forced to control herself, to say something, anything, to keep back her tears, while he himself was

able to find solace for his grief in movement, in the open air, in the free flow of his tears. . . . Ah! the eternal inequality in the division of suffering, the eternal excess of misery that awaits the woman, with her more tender soul, the less adequate equipment of her mind, which is for ever turned in upon herself: her more barbarous desire: her more sensitive body: her solitude, her religious heart, her immobility, her duties, her duties, always her duties. . . . Did any man ever feel all this more acutely than he! What a contempt he felt for the sufferings of men with their inherited hardness, their multiple interests, their liberty. . . . He had a sort of feeling of shame at being a man.

Women passed him, working women, slowly going home to their gloomy homes at the end of a joyless day like all their days. . . . But, at least, in their poor rooms, they will be by themselves, they will be able to weep. . . . All women seemed to him to be happier than Madeleine. . . . Besides, these women had not her sensibility, her education.

. . . Madeleine seemed to him to be the symbol of unhappiness, sheer unhappiness, the only unhappiness in the world. . . . It seemed to him that for two thousand years nature and the ways of men had been working together with no other end than to assure the unhappiness of that one wretched woman.

He saw her sitting with her family, forced to control herself, to say something, anything, to keep back her tears. . . . And in the writings of authors of alleged "profundity" he had read that a forced abstention from the physical expression of grief keeps back grief. And current morality also assured him that "they were made to suffer," that "they were used to it," that "all is well and for the best." . . . How he girded at such base methods of avoiding the need to pity. How he detested those who urged such methods upon him. How he crushed them with the saying of the master: "The truth is that it is impossible to pity a woman enough."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Nietzsche.

And he saw Madeleine growing thinner and paler, with her poor, sunken, pinched, drawn face. And all these mental images which would have repelled a strong heart, jealous of its strength, bound him by his horrible need of growing weaker. He melted at the sight of her tears. And the mere sight of Madeleine—apart altogether from her grief—with her childlike eyes, her sweet face, her gentle ways, made him sink and yield: her poor yearning heart could not even bear suffering without giving forth the idea of gentleness and ingenuousness.

And to think how young the poor creature was! . . . Ah! Indeed he pitied the martyrdom of a poor creature, left to fade away, sewn up alive in the shroud of her last ecstasy. . . . But at least she is old and suffering becomes her. . . . But the suffering of a young woman, a woman keyed up to the delight of living, a creature in the bud, of whom men say that she is meant to grow and to expand, is revolting, horrible, injurious.



And to think of her gentleness, her tact in her suffering! . . . If only she had reproached him, made demands on him, threatened him. . . . That would have given him the strength deliberately to hurt her and make an end. . . . But no, there she was, looking at him with the eyes of an affectionate dog, holding out her throat for him to cut. . . . He hated her for not defending herself.

And he would think of her in the evening, after dinner, alone in her little room with her son, holding back her tears in his presence. . . . And the boy looking at her, surprised that she too could know suffering as he did, and respecting her less for it. . . . Oh! the infamy of forcing tears upon those who should remain great. . . . Shame, shame, he cried, upon those who have humiliated the mothers! . . .

And he would see her at night, sitting up in her bed, thinking, thinking. . . . Ah! it is an unique kind of misery that of the woman who feels that she is loved less, the imprisoned

creature wondering: "Where is he? What is he doing? What is he thinking? What will he be like to-morrow?" Knowing her own impotence and thinking: "What can I do if he wants to leave me!"—the woman's nightmare, her lover's liberty.—And then the night, in its solemnity telling her how from all time eternally women have clung to the same dream as herself, and how eternally they have come to shipwreck; and then the dawning day bringing with it the ideal of the dull, eternally dull, life, lit up by no single ray of love. . . . How truly and exactly he felt all that! That and so many other peculiarly feminine sorrows: the utter devastation of the ruin of love: the nausea of the return to reason, independence, an undivided heart: and the image of the lover, appearing charming, unique, irreplaceable, as he fades away into the distance: and the doom of living in the places where everything tells of him, with people who will speak his name, . . . how precisely he was conscious of all that!

And he would walk on breathlessly. Crazed with pity, not thinking only of the woman, not feeling only through her, but putting himself in her place, in a condition of real altruism, in the submission, the submissiveness of the ego. A condition of sentimental alienation. . . . And he thought of those who have made fun of these things: "People always have strength enough to bear the ills of others." Idiot! As if pity did not consist precisely in the ills of others becoming our own. And he thought of the "psychologue"—the dramaturgist of "love"—who stops and paints the sufferings of a man who is too much loved, a fatuous fool! who had seen only irritation and not pity. . . . Sometimes he would sit down with his hands on his heart as though he were trying to check its disaffection. And he would sigh: "Shall I never get away from my pity for her? Shall I never return to consciousness of myself, of myself alone, utterly alone? Will it always be contaminated with the consciousness of another?" And he would think of those who

have preached the gospel of pity. . . . Fools! Fools! They have never felt it!

Sometimes he would escape. He would think: "She is young. She will repair her life. She will have other lovers. . . ." And suddenly he would feel something pierce his heart: "They will make her suffer."

And he would rend himself with the thought of the woman's sorrows—as a man rends himself with the thought of a child's troubles—making himself responsible for all her suffering. He would scourge himself with the reflection that she had no connections, no fortune, no amusement. . . . As if he were to blame for that. . . . He pitied her far more than her suffering under these disadvantages called for, attributing to her his own needs and forgetting that she had been brought up like that.

At times he would think of making a work of art of their adventure. And suddenly he

would think: "Yes, that's it. I will escape into fiction and succeed and be a great man. . . ." And he saw the Beatrices, the Lauras, the Elviras abandoned and growing old while their poets were celebrated by the world. And he would detest all poets.

And his unease grew. He sank deeper and deeper into pity for women. He based his pity on the misfortunes of the whole sex, the passage from childhood to virginity, from virginity to womanhood. . . . On their enslaved condition, slaves whom men feed and clothe. . . . He pitied even their beauty, their victimisation, their living under the necessity of giving pleasure. . . . Naturally he refused to see their compensations, their power, their triumphs, their insolence. He detested the men who saw these things. . . . What a contempt he had for all those who made fun of women!

And everywhere he found food for his malady. . . . The sight of women in the street old before their time, coarsened in spite

of themselves; in gardens, of young resigned mothers dragging their children in their train; or, in music-halls, of so-called smart women, blazoning their husbands, slaves in silk and pearl necklaces. Everywhere he found the slaves' prison of women. In flashes he would think: "And their ferocity? And their delight in torturing men?" His heart would leap on that: "So much the better if they avenge themselves!"

Sometimes in a train he would see a comfortable, large, red-faced woman whose husband would call her: "Mummy." And he would think: "That is a happy woman. . . . That is their lot: either brutalisation or misery in soul."

And it would seem to him that no one had any pity for women. And it would seem to him that no one had any pity for any one. How amusing of people to proscribe pity! As if there were any to proscribe! As if all the unhappy people were not the enemies of the rest! As if anybody could bear for long the use that they

make of one—"Stay a little. You are in no great hurry"—in the hope of escaping their misery! . . . Ah! But we are too clever for them!—"You must be reasonable. Come, come. Everything turns in time."—And we push them back into the morass.

One evening he went out walking, torn by the memory of the day, torn by the memory of the slow cruelty he had inflicted on her with his ill-feigned joys, his clumsily concealed evasions, his cunningly awkward lies. . . . And now, in her bed, she would be thinking of it all. . . . And he walked on, tormented by the thought of her. He went along by the river: far from the sight of relative, indulgent men: he was drunk with confession, drunk with preening himself in his absolute shame, drunk with a blight that only nature or the dead can give. . . . He thought of Madeleine's father who had so loved her. And it seemed to him that her father would call him to account for the fate of the child whom only they two had loved. . . . And

suddenly he called up the image of Madeleine as a little girl, Madeleine sleeping in her little brass bed, as she had described it to him, with her hands clasped under her cheek, and her lips parted, in the twilight. . . . And it seemed to him that, if there were any justice in the world, it should demand that life should bring only gentleness and tenderness to the adorable sleeping child. And life had brought only bitterness and harshness, giving a wryness to the expression of her lips, as though she were suffering under some dreadful dream that she did not understand. . . . And now that fate had justly granted her—dear, beloved creature—a little love, and a little happiness, it was only to lay her low! . . . Then he could contain himself no longer, and with all his soul yearning towards her innocence and fragility, he ran on through the night, crying through his sobs: “Never, never, will I do anything to injure her. . . .”

And, clinging to his desire to love, fortified



by his tears, he cried again in fierce self-castigation: "I love her still! . . . Surely a man must love a woman if he can weep for her like that. . . ."

The unhappy wretch was wearing himself out with trying to pretend that his crazy pity was love.



Meanwhile together with his pity, and because of it, his feeling of being bound and his longing for freedom only increased. He had terrible gusts of independence. Madeleine suffered them, though they prostrated her. He was surfeited with pity for her and detested her for it. . . . He was most horribly torn between the worst kind of egoism and the craziest tenderness.

In her tactless confidence she went on telling him everything more precisely than ever. She told him of her household troubles, of her strained relations with her husband and his family, of her disappointments in her boy, Pierre. . . . In his heart he revolted.

Why could she not keep all these things to herself? In truth she found much pleasure in touching him to pity. . . . He had not been born into the world for that. . . . All because she "loved" him! A woman's invention, that conception of love with its confusion between love and the solace that comes from telling all that stultifies it. . . . He would answer her curtly. When she left him she would weep over it. He knew that. . . . And he wept at the thought of her tears.

Often he would feel a genuine anger at the marks of suffering which were beginning to appear in her. "As if it were not sad enough that I do not love her any more, without her forcing me to see how she is wasting away and how hard lines are settling about her lips! . . ."

One day she told him about her first confinement, the stillborn child, which had had to be cut in pieces before they could bring it

forth, while they had been unable to make any anæsthetic take effect. . . . She told him the story quite simply, as though it were the most ordinary matter in the world. He listened stupidly. He thought of the accumulation of suffering that women bear, and how the idea of tribulation never repelled them. . . . He seemed to himself to be rather foolish to have so much consideration for her.

He watched her perishing for lack of love, and springing to life again at a caress; she was made for feeling, only for feeling, for nothing but feeling. . . . It seemed to him that in refusing to allow her to suffer he was committing the supreme offence—the offence contemned by the poet, of having pity on those whom God has doomed.<sup>1</sup>

And still she was as attentive to him as in their early days, brought him trifles that he had desired, flowers that he loved. . . . He was incensed against her for forcing a tender welcome upon him, accused her of doing it

<sup>1</sup>Dante, *Inferno*, xx. 30.

deliberately, of knowing that she was forcing it upon him.

And now he was careful to avoid noticing a number of small desires that she expressed, to keep her waiting, not always to be free on the days she appointed. . . . With horrible skill and cunning he gradually accustomed her to the idea of being loved less.

When they left their flat, if it were already dark, he would take her home. They would stop the carriage some distance away from her house. . . . In the old days she used to leave him at once and take her happiness in his caresses back with her into her prison. Now she hesitated before returning to the house the emptiness of which, lying in wait for her, was now augmented by her thoughts. She would linger with her hand in his. . . . And he would feel her then, in the dark, silent and restive, with the tragic restiveness of a woman in the face of her inward thoughts, like a dog on the way to its cart, or a lamb nearing the slaughter-house: he would feel

her clinging to him, fully conscious that she was disturbing him, obsessing him, that he would soon throw her aside, that she would suffer more the more she clung, and still clinging. . . . Meanwhile he would think: "In five minutes I shall be free, I shall read the papers. . . . I can hold out till then. . . ." And she would guess his calculated patience: she would be conscious of the relief he would feel a moment later. She would try to delay. . . . But the moment would come and she would sigh: "Well, I must go in." . . . And all night he would be haunted by the thought of her going back to her melancholy house, turning back towards him, and himself smiling at her with a forced smile through the window of the carriage as it bore him away. . . .



And now she began to struggle.

As she began to feel her lover's love slipping away from her she strove desperately to

give it the air of an established thing, either in the hope of making herself believe it by so doing, or because she was trying to enslave the man by the faith she showed in him. . . . "You are rude to me," she would write, "and yet you love me." "Why do you hurt me so, when you love me?" "You love me more than you say, more perhaps than you think," etc. . . . In his heart he rebelled. What! All that because he was absently gentle with her, absent in his caresses, because he replied "Yes" when she said, "Do you love me?" As if there were any choice in the matter! As if the tone were not everything! . . . No! She would never understand. . . . She would force him to say: "I don't love you any longer." And she knew perfectly well that he no longer loved her! . . . But she kept on saying to herself: "As long as he does not speak I will ignore it: I will keep him. . . ." Then he would respond with a similar exploitation of masculine dues, a similar lack of honesty. . . . Then, suddenly, he would see only one thing,

one single fixed idea; the vast extent of their distress that it could bring them to such humiliation, to acceptance of such humiliation. . . . And once more he would sink back into his crazy sympathy.

She would write:

"Darling, your love is changing. You feel it: and you are suffering. You dare not tell me, dare not confess it to yourself. . . . Why dare you not? . . . Well, you will love me differently, tenderly, etc. . . ." He crumpled the letter up. As if love could "change"! As if its only change were not in death! As if she did not know that! . . . Then, suddenly, he would feel how wretched she must be to come and beg for the ashes of love, knowing them to be ashes. . . . And once more he would sink back into his crazy sympathy.

And again:

"I am mad with impatience. . . . And I shan't see you until to-morrow! . . . Yesterday, when you left me, your expression was

ominous: your voice, your eyes, everything condemned me. . . . I cried all night. . . . I wrote you a letter, but burned it. You would have thought me mad. . . . I fancied that you wanted to leave me and go away. . . . Ah! It was mad of me, wasn't it? I know that you love me. . . . But the idea was too frightful! . . . I have nothing but you in the world, etc. . . ."—That made him long to break, and make an end. His sense of justice protested: No, you have no right to inflict such a responsibility on another human being, to let your whole life depend on her frown. . . . And yet he had never so rawly felt the impossibility of leaving her: he thought of her as a drowning woman clinging to a boat; should he take an axe and hack off her hands?

She felt that she was obsessing him with her love. And she tried hard to talk to him about other things, the day's doings, the passers-by. . . . But it was embarrassing and tedious for him. She only knew how to love:



she had no ideas, no mind. . . . And then she was forcing her voice, her figure, the expression in her eyes, her joy in being with him, her clinging to him, and always, always, her love, upon his attention. . . . He became unjust, brutal, and hated her for making him so, and became more so. . . . And at night, when she was gone, he would call up her poor miserable face and he would have given years of his life to be able to drink her tears and see her smile once more.

Sometimes she would come and sit in a corner with a book, or a piece of sewing, and wish him to go on with what he was doing without bothering about her. . . . He would write, or, even, work! . . . And out of the corner of his eye he would see her fixing him with a long worshipping look. . . . And he would think peevishly: "Just another woman's trick not to let a man go, to deify him!" And he would hate her for making him ridiculous.

She loved his delicate hands and his long

eyelashes. It exasperated him to be forced to play the cherubin for her. . . . As if men needed to be loved!

At last he came to detest woman with her childish mind, her childish desires, her childish eyes, her childish features, and her way of dragging a man into her childish tricks, and forcing him to see the greatest things in a sensual, tender, pretty aspect; her brutalisation of man in base intercourse, in exclusive preoccupation with the things next to hand, things immediate, things directly felt. . . . He reached such a point that when he was with her in her house he used to long for her husband's presence. A dogmatic, ponderous, tiresome man! But that did not matter: he was at any rate a man, a being possessed of a few general ideas.

And he detested women for the lewdness of their hearts, always ready to give, to devote themselves, without reserve. . . . And people admire them for it! As if they had anything

else to do but to give themselves to others, being, as they are, nothing by themselves! As if it were not a form of egoism in them! . . . And he detested their horrible power—which is also admired—of losing sight of reason for a moment's joy! . . . And the dreadful atmosphere of demoralisation which they cast about love, the terrible savour of death that they can instil into a kiss! And their easy delight in it! How thoroughly he now approved of the men whom women call brutes, the men who send them packing with their "poetry," take, enjoy them and pass on.

And he was overcome by horror, horror of the woman, horror of her tenderness, horror of her presence. Now when she came to him he would suddenly have a violent palpitation in his heart, which he took for a spasm of pity, though it was fear: recognition of the presence of the enemy. . . . In their flat he could still bear her: his horror of her was blurred into the desire to take . . .; he would forget his hatred in his joy in her. . . . But

elsewhere . . . in her house, in their friends' houses, he suffered agonies of terror lest they should be left alone! When they were left together he would avoid her eyes: he would carefully construct his sentences to avoid having to say "*tu*"; he would carefully disguise any expression that might lead back to love. Meanwhile he would see her leaning back in her chair, with her eyes fixed on him, patient and determined. . . .

Then, in the evening, he would walk on and on. . . . He would find some means of defending himself. . . . He would not endure it. . . . Other men did not endure it. . . . There was no reason why he should act differently from other men. . . . Yes, but other men do not understand! . . . And he did understand! . . . His intelligence imposed certain duties on him. . . . But what duties? To allow himself to be swallowed up by the unhappy? No. What, then? To fling them back into the water and go his way? That was just literary nonsense! As if it were

possible. . . . But provision has been made for everything. There exist people especially for them: priests, doctors, natural consolers. . . . Yes, ready-made pity! They don't want it! They want pity cut to measure. Pity made expressly for them. . . . They want some one to devour! . . . But I am mad! I am dramatising the whole thing! She is not asking so much as that! She is asking for no great thing. . . . I can easily give it her. . . . No, no! I cannot! Whatever she asks me, it is too much.

And he would walk on, dogged, at bay, seeking any and every promise of a way out, but finding every issue closed. . . . Every now and then, in flashes, he would realise that he was wishing for her death.



He was waiting for her in their flat, sitting deep in an arm-chair, worn out with beating for the last two days against the walls of his

blind-alley. . . . She came in. He felt his heart thump, and it went on thumping, never stopped. . . . For some time he managed to contain himself and show a good front. . . . But soon he could do it no longer and he begged her to open a window. She did so and then came swiftly and sat on the arm of his chair and asked him what was the matter. He looked at her with an angry expression which said clearly: "Don't you see that you are the matter with me?" . . . She made him a posset. He refused it and his eyes said: "Don't you see that what I want is my liberty, and for you to go?" And she seemed to reply with a tragic obstinacy in seeming not to see his looks: "I will not give you that," while she tried to make herself as small as possible, to assuage his anxiety, and to make him tolerate her.

And now he reached the crisis of his madness and despair, the beating of his heart would not be still, and he had a growing certainty that such a state of things could not

be endured, that he must desire and demand his right to live, his freedom; and as he struggled, breathlessly contemplating the hurt he was about to deal her, his heart—precisely because of the commotion in it and its furious beating—was absolutely, desperately exposed to every kind of pity and to every kind of fear.

. . . He had met her in a garden at nightfall. . . . He dragged after her, with his head bowed, with no strength left even to pretend to enjoy anything, answering her in short, gentle, weary sentences. She walked by his side, tragically forcing herself to say something, anything, trying not to be too tender in her dread of irritating him, and above all in her dread of having to ask him what was the matter with him. . . . He dragged along by her side. She walked along with him. . . . And so they went, in the empty garden, conscious of the oppression of their silence, feeling it gathering weight from moment to moment, and the impending neces-

sity, growing up bewilderingly, surely, in them, the necessity of explanation, obedient to the logic of the world, and utterly independent of their wills. . . .

They took a carriage and stopped it at the usual place. . . . They were silent. She could not bring herself to get out. She sat there gloomily with her hand in his. . . . Neither spoke a word. . . . Slowly she took up her bag and got ready to go. . . . Tremblingly she said:

"I will come to-morrow. . . . About three o'clock. . . ."

He said faintly:

"Very well."

Still trembling, more than ever now:

"Perhaps . . . it will upset your plans. . . . Perhaps you would prefer Thursday. . . ."

"As you please. . . . No. . . . Very well. . . . To-morrow."

Almost on the point of collapse, gathering all her forces, she said:

"Listen, Félix. . . . I can't go on living



like this. . . . Answer me. . . . Don't you . . . don't you love me any longer?"

Cowardly he muttered:

"Am I to tell you . . . that? And then to let you go back to your prison! . . ."

She withdrew her hand, her whole being shrinking away from him, and she turned pale and answered:

"Ah! . . . You have answered me. . . ."

He took her in his arms. He told her that he was mad and did not know what he was saying. . . . She did not hear him nor see him. . . . The power of thought oozed away in the presence of the malevolent, uncomprehended and sacred force that was shattering her happiness, and numbed with wretchedness and her impotence to understand she said very simply:

"Why don't you love me any longer?"

She opened the door and he saw her disappear among the passers-by and the shopkeepers putting up their shutters.

He hurried towards the centre of the town

and the busy, thronged streets; in a real frenzy. . . . Oh! It was no longer the frantic dread of the future! His mind was made up: to-morrow morning, as soon as possible, he would go to her; he would make some excuse; he would win her back, reassure her, tell her that they must . . . ; as far as he himself was concerned, with the awful palpitations of his heart, he would contrive as best he could. . . . For now he knew one thing only, that it was beyond his strength to leave her. . . . No, his horror was at the thought of the coming night, which he would have to spend with his fixed idea, the fixed image of the woman, seeing the carriage again, the fatal scene, her pitiful cry, and the woman herself, at home, thinking that everything was at an end. . . . A whole night spent like that! And it was only seven o'clock! He went into a bar, and out again and into another where he began to talk to the women. He left that too and went elsewhere. . . . He was haunted by the sight of the staring eyes of the unhappy woman feeling that every-

thing cried her doom, refusing to take the fatal step, clinging to uncertainty . . . , by her terror when she was forced to ask . . . , and—afterwards—by the utter helplessness of the creature of love lacking love, the sudden deathlike despair which suddenly came into her childlike face, her sudden solitude, her surprise, her surprise like that of some gentle wounded beast asking “Why?” her still loving stupefaction under the blow that crushed her. . . . Oh! all the tortures of eternal bondage, all the tremors of the heart of eternal servitude, all at once, with joy, rather than live again through such a moment. . . . He drove right across Paris. . . . He passed the stations. If he had gone at once he would have already been far away. . . . It would all be over by now. . . . Sooner or later he would have to go. . . . But now he saw her in her room, sitting up in her bed, waking alone in the house where all were asleep, watching in silence; she was thinking that he was going, being borne away from her by a train, that she would never see him again, that he was

taking her heart with him, and that she would be left doomed to life-long emptiness, to memory, doomed for the whole of her life, and that soon, at dawn, the first day of her doom would begin. . . . And it was he who had inflicted such a night of torment upon another human being! His whole life would not be a sufficient price to pay for it. . . . There were still eight hours before he could go to her. . . . The cafés were closed, the lights put out, the streets emptied . . ., and he thought: "Night defers the distraction of sorrow; if only it were deferring sorrow!" Suddenly he was possessed by the idea that she had killed herself. He hurried in the direction of her house. He tried to think that he was only idiotically inventing things to frighten himself. . . . He found himself standing in front of her house. . . . People were coming and going. . . . Suppose she had not come home; suppose she had thrown herself under a train. . . . He was conscious of the egoism of his fears that she would kill herself. . . . As if it would not have been

better for her. . . . He went home, flung himself fully dressed on his bed, could find no rest, went out again at dawn, and began to wander about until nine o'clock should come. He regained a certain measure of tranquillity as he felt the hour approaching when he would be able to console her. He cried to her through space: "Do not weep, my love. I am here. I will stay. I am coming. I love you." At the same time he thought that no doubt she was beginning to get used to the idea of separation, and that it was horrible of him to return to disturb her new mastery of herself, . . . only to leave her in a little while.

He bought a popular novel and cut the pages of it. . . . He rang at Madeleine's door. . . . His fears returned to him. . . . The maid opened to him. He breathed again. There was nothing ominous in her appearance. . . . He said that he had brought back a book he had borrowed, which Madeleine had particularly asked for. . . . He was

asked to wait in the drawing-room. It excited him to be there at such a time—symbolical of his malady. . . . She came in, pale, erect, in a long black gown; she was dejected and composed. He took her in his arms and pressed her to him with a warmth which he took for love and pity, though it came from the coward's veneration for the creature of courage who had been able to retain her self-control through her unhappiness. . . . She suffered him and kissed him gently; she was distant and consoled him for the wretched night he had spent. . . . She knew that he would come again, that he was not callous or cruel. . . . She promised to come to him in the afternoon. . . . He left her comforted; he thought his reassurance came from the return of their love, but it came from the knowledge that their union was doomed, that he had confessed and she had heard and understood.



She had understood him. . . . She no

longer thought their love eternal. It was now a human thing, something which would "last as long as these things do," a long time, perhaps for ever, but at the mercy of chance, and not of its own essence. . . . She saw her lover now in a human light—egoistic, apt to tire. She still loved him, but she no longer admired him. . . .—And she became practical: she ceased to mourn for that which was no longer, and tried to keep that which still existed.

She strove to give him more liberty. . . . She busied herself with her boy and her household. . . . She attended lectures! Visited museums! The poor creature of tenderness was striving to "understand"! . . . Sometimes she would refuse to come to him on the plea of some "interesting" lecture or some "amusing" tea-party. She was trying to make him believe that she was the cause of their meeting less often. . . . He was conscious of her effort and her suffering through it. . . . And he was finding it easier to bear.

. . . He was beginning to see the coming of the day when he would cease to pity her and would find himself free.

She tried to make him believe that she had returned to coquetry, thinking to make him feel more free! . . . She hinted at "flirtations" and her renewed pleasure in attracting attention. . . . He was cowardly enough to pretend to believe her.

And yet she was no longer the same. She was no longer his chattel; she was endeavouring to cope with him . . . ; and, further, she had a few shadowy interests outside him. . . . Though he was considerably relieved, yet he had a sort of masculine irritation at being frustrated. He became aware of a strange feeling in himself, a feeling which he had often derided in other men, a feeling of resentment against the woman for regaining her self-possession after he had thrown everything over in order to win her.

Gradually he returned to consciousness of



his need of luxury, and he fed it.—He no longer condemned his sisters.

He visualised the first night when he had gone to Madeleine's room—with her poor little corsets hanging over the back of a chair. And he thought: "I did not love her poverty. I forced myself to love it. I was full of regret for the luxury of the other women. . . ."

And he mused:

"It is odd: all middle-class people are ashamed of their middle-class tastes. . . . They would like to have the tastes of the poor . . . because only the tastes of the poor are supposed to be beautiful. I wonder who will write the æsthetic of the middle-classes?"

And he returned to the æsthetic of bondage. . . . How fine, he thought, would be the union of two strong creatures coming together in the simple consciousness of the meeting of their force, with no base desire to bind, or to seek support. . . .

Meanwhile he gave her less and less.

He saw her at their flat at increasingly long intervals. He came to her cruelly free in spirit, with a love that was entirely conscious of its relativeness, a reluctant and deliberately calculated ardour of possession. . . . And she responded with a nicely measured happiness, cut exactly to sort with his, obviously determined not to exceed the bounds he set. . . . He would take her home, chatting gaily and amicably, with never a reference to their intimacy. . . . And she would leave him, slowly, miserably, disillusioned, in a sort of shame for their reasoned love.

Came the anniversary of their first coming together. . . . Six o'clock. He had never mentioned it. . . . They went out. She still hoped. . . . Not a flower. Not a word. . . . They parted.

She tried hard to think that he was right, that she ought to cure herself of such childishness. . . .

She would tell herself that he ought not

to feel enslaved by their meetings, or be forced for her sake to leave his work or some pleasant gathering. . . . Sometimes she would go to their flat and read or play the piano, and he would come or not, as he pleased.

One day he was out walking in lovely April weather. . . . She waited for him. . . . He did not come. . . . Purposely to make her used to it. . . . He was haunted by the idea of her counting the minutes, opening the door at every sound on the stairs, watching the day dying like her hopes, going out shamefacedly past the porter, and coming back again, discountenanced. . . .

Next day she told him that he had acted quite rightly.

Often, as he sat in some empty street, he would catch a glimmering of the day when he would leave her—in the dim future,—and he would see the reproachful expression with which all her life she would think of him, with which even now she faced him. He would think: “It is odd how resentful they are, as

though it were a man's own fault. We can't help it if we don't love them any longer. . . ." He felt that there was a false ring in his defence. . . . And he came to this: "It is not a matter of loving. She must have known for a long time that I don't love her. And she accepts that. But what a woman asks in such a case is that the man should go on seeming to love, pretending enough for her to be able to keep him without too much indignity, and that he should be there and go on seeing her occasionally. . . . And the man knows perfectly well that that is all she asks of him. . . . And he could quite easily do it. . . . But he does not want to. . . . Oh! Well! Women have a perfect right to be resentful. . . ."

And he discovered his own utter helplessness:

"If I stay, I shall die. If I go, she will die. . . . One of us must kill the other. . . . And as I am the stronger, I shall kill her. . . . Well then! no more thinking, no more

phrase-making; it is war at its most cowardly: the stronger is out to kill the weaker."

And he thought of those who say: "What could I do if she were unhappy, wretchedly married, or deceived by her children? . . ." And he answered himself: "I could comfort her, hear her plaint. . . . That would be something. . . . I can't get it out of my head that that would be something. . . . It's just nonsense, a fad on the part of the 'thinkers' who know nothing whatever of life, to say that it would not be something and that it would feed her unhappiness. . . ."

One evening he put his arm in Madeleine's and said: "You see. All is well. You are no longer anxious. You are sure of me. . . . Let me go away for a fortnight, or perhaps less. I shan't go far. I want to be alone for a little, to think over all the things that have been upsetting us during the last three months. . . ." She understood. . . . He was to go away on the next day but one. She

came to the station. . . . The train began to move. . . . He remained standing at the carriage window for a long time. She smiled at him. . . .

### III

HE took a room in the Grand Hotel at F \* \* \*, which at this season of the year was empty. . . . He was born again. He took a new delight in seeing, breathing, being. . . . He was absolutely free. . . . True, he still had ties. But they were lightly to be borne, and gradually they would be loosened.

He had been there for two days, but she had not written. He found reasons why she had not done so, but he was astonished.

Four days. . . . Five days. . . . She did not write.

It seemed to him that an immeasurable space of time and distance was stretching between them.

He was quivering with his independence.

The sixth day came.

It ended.

She did not write.

Her silence was terrible: more overwhelming than all her complaints. One thing was clear, that as soon as she had dared to look things in the face and had been forced to admit that she was no longer loved, she had determined to withdraw into her own life. . . . He saw the grim mockery of her resolution. . . . He saw the woman grimly setting herself to the checking of her impulse, the confinement of her love, the stifling of her affection . . .; her mute indignation at having no one left to love; her gloomy gibing at love and love's vows; her frightful resolve never to believe in anything again; and her silent hatred. . . . He saw all that. And at the same time her silence hurt him like a blow and it seemed to him that she was flinging his liberty in his face.

He waited yet a day. Then he left. He wanted to see her. He wanted to know. . . . He wanted first of all to know what she was like alone, when he was no longer with her, to see her without her knowing it.



Towards nightfall, at the hour when he knew she would be returning home, he went and took up his position in a corner where he could see her without being seen. . . . He stood thus for some time, excited and agitated. Soon, some distance away, he saw her coming gravely towards him through the hurrying throng of people, with her eyes fixed on the ground, holding her little boy by the hand. He trembled. At once he recognised her, exactly as he had felt she would be, gloomy, sad, in travail to regain the solitude of her heart. She came towards him; every line in her figure expressed heaviness and yet she was thinner, had lost her lissomeness. She raised her head; he saw that her childlike features had in a week become sharply defined, had lost their play and lightness, and that they were disfigured not so much by the marks of suffering as by the marks of her will; he saw that her eyes were glassy and staring, as though they had lost their energy, and looked for nothing, expected nothing. . . . Now she was at the foot of the slope

which led to her house, and she went slowly up it, as though she were dragging with her the burden of her servitude that day by day would weigh upon her whole existence. And he thought: "Every night of her life she will go up that slope in exactly the same way!" Then he could not contain himself. He wanted to cry out: "Madeleine, you are not alone. . . . I will not leave you. I love you." He wanted to rush out of his hiding-place and go to her. . . . He could easily contrive to make her hear him. . . . He stopped. His heart was like to break. It was a supreme moment. What! With the poor woman trying to gather the fragments of her life! . . . Should he go and upset her as he had done before, only to leave her again? . . . For he did not love her. . . . Now she was quite close to him. . . . Only a word, a look, and she would be restored to life. . . . Oh, come! She knew what his words were worth! And besides she asked nothing of him. She asked only to be left in peace, to win back to serenity. . . . Not for her sake would he

speak, but for his own, being too cowardly to bear his own cruelty. . . . Come, come! A truce to such cowardice. . . . Breathlessly he leaned back against the wall and swore that he would not move. . . . He let her pass. . . .

He let her pass. . . . When she had gone, he came out of his hiding-place and went down a street to the right, up the hill. He walked on, still agitated. . . . He knew that it was for shabby, cowardly reasons that he had made himself believe that she was so well on the road to recovery and would be distressed if he had troubled her again. . . . He went on and on. . . . He came to a great empty square, looking down on the quarter, where there were several seats. He sat down on one of them.

Night came. He felt the last gusts of his emotion dying down with the light of day. . . . The whole world was sinking into rest. . . . Now he was calm. . . . And his calm-

ness endured. . . . Then he ventured to call to mind the image of Madeleine returning home, to her misery, yearning towards her lover, and yet with all her force suppressing her yearning. . . . And her image did not bring him so much agony as he had feared. He considered it more fixedly, more deliberately, more searchingly. . . . And he found that he could bear it. . . . Then he called to mind the image of Madeleine as she would be in five years, ten years, going up the street just as he had seen her now. . . . And he could bear that too. . . . Then he was visited by a mortal sadness. He understood that he had suffered and groaned for the last time. . . . For almost two years he had been weeping over this woman. He had exhausted his capacity for pity. No longer would he have any but the gentlest tears. It was finished.

He remained sitting on the seat and could not bring himself to leave, or to take action. He stayed, dully contemplating his empty

heart, gazing down at the ruins of three years of his life. He stayed. Dull. . . .

Then in the solemn silence of the night he saw quite clearly and simply the whole course of the adventure:

He had been living free, happy and lustily, when he had met an unhappy woman. And he had stooped to her and he had wept. And, mad with love and gratitude, she had taken him to her arms. And at first he had enjoyed it and acquiesced. Then when the tie between them and his tenderness had weakened and he had wished to move on and had tried to return to the high road of freedom he had been too late, his veins had been filled with the poison of pity. . . . And he had almost died of it. . . .

Then, in the solemn silence of the night, clearly and simply the meaning of his adventure appeared to him:

Madeleine was no longer the poor pretty

little fair-haired woman who dined miserably in her stuffy room with her stupid husband and the child to whom she was indifferent . . . ; she was all women, the highest and the lowliest, she stood for all the creatures of weakness and servitude. And what she had done was what they would all have done, what they would always do. Always madly, fiercely they would cling to the free, strong man, who, alone among men, would regard them as other than a prey, and give them a little gentleness, a little love. And always, at the same time, in obedience to a secret instinct, they would strive surreptitiously to abolish in him the springs of force and liberty—the worship of the Idea, and the taste for the things of the polite world—and to develop in him the worship of the heart, to give free play in it for the powers of weakness and vassalage. . . . And always in his happiness the man would at first submit, unsuspectingly, disarmedly; more than that! he would at first himself set about destroying his strength and enthroning his weakness be-

cause he had been—strong though he was—because he had been—free though he was—brought up in the æsthetic of the weak and the servile; because there is no other æsthetic. . . . And always in his happiness the man would come near to death because in his enjoyment he had exhausted his infinite sensibility, because he had chosen to weep with the unhappy without being accustomed, as they are, to tears; because, in fine, he would feel pity. . . .

For pity is death: that is what he had learned, what he now knew, what he would never forget. . . . But if he knew it, it was because he had really felt pity, because his heart had been cleft by the unhappy woman's misery, and had blindly yielded to their real communion and hour by hour, through the wound made in its integrity, had suffered all its power of life and all its desire to ebb away. And then he dreamed of another kind of pity, no doubt equally sincere, that should not prevent those who practise it from

going and coming, and seeking amusement, and looking after their affairs and bringing up their children. . . . And again he dreamed of another kind of pity which should gently raise the wretched kneeling suppliants, but should not prevent the Redeemer who expounds it from uttering fine phrases, and making grand gestures, and thinking of laying low the proud ones of the earth. . . . Ah! such kinds of pity can be practised, can be propagated, can be taught. . . . They do not lead to death! . . .

And he hypnotised himself with reiteration of this truth: "Pity is death. Pity is death." . . . And he wished to live. . . . Then? . . . Then? . . .

He shrank for a long time before the answer which now faced him, logical, thunderous, implacable. . . . He shrank from it for a long time. . . . Then, slowly, he came to it, like a child coming to the estate of



manhood, with all the solemn simplicity of an ordination. . . .

Then. . . . He would be hard. . . . Without a word, with never a look he would pass by all such dramas, such distress, the sight of human beings walled up alive in their inward life, all the women crucified on the marriage bed, turning their lips away from their tyrants. . . . And they would call to him, they would hold out their arms to him, guessing that he understood, that his hardness was feigned; and the world would cry shame upon him—How cold he is! How hard! What a cruel nature!—He would let them say and think what they liked. . . . And he would go to the strong, to men, to the thinkers, the creators, to those who never expect anything of a man. . . . And perhaps one day he would be strong enough to dare to face the weak and the unhappy and come to their aid. . . . But his heart was breaking as he felt that he could have no tenderness for them. For he was naturally tender: and

he wept there in the darkness and said to himself: "They talk of the tears of pity. But who shall tell of the tears of those who have stifled their pity in order to make themselves hard. . . ."

But at least his hardness was a thing which he had bought and paid for with the suffering of unhappy pity. . . . His hardness was sad, silent, resigned. . . . He wished to suffer from it, out of respect, as it were, for those whom he would not help. And from his calvary he cried to the apostles of hardness in happiness: "Shame, shame on those who rejoice in their hardness."

For a long time he remained in silent prayer at the feet of that hard God who had made the strong; the masters; the real masters, those who can check their tears in order to understand them. . . . For a long time he stayed thus. . . . Day came, and lit up the street where Madeleine lived and the little house where she lay asleep. . . . And

the street seemed to him to be very much like any other street. . . . And the little house was much less distinctive than it had been before. . . . Then he understood that during the night the outline of his love had faded away into eternal lines. Then he collapsed and desperately he held out his arms as though he wished to clutch and hold in his trembling hands those beloved fleeting things which had been his life, his tears, his youth. . . . And his arms fell by his sides once more . . . in the last convulsion of his dying love. . . . He left the seat and walked down into the town.



**PART II**

**DOWNFALL**

Until thou shalt be dead to all  
Created love, thou shalt not know me.  
(*Imitation*, III. xlii.)

## I

"OH! sir," said the nurse indignantly, "You are not even looking at Suzanne's splendid tunnel."

"Very fine," said Félix, turning. . . . "But we'll make an even better one than that."

He put two chairs back to back and laid a large atlas across the space between them.

The child clapped her hands:

"Look out!" she cried. "Get out of the way! The train is coming. . . ."

She went to the end of the passage to get a good run. Then she came with a rush, working her arms like a crank, whistling and puffing, gathering speed until she dashed through the improvised tunnel into the arms of her father and mother.

"Now," she said, "I'll go and fetch my biplane."

But Clémence stopped her:

"No, no. You are out of breath. . . . And you know your father doesn't like you to turn his study into a circus. . . . Let us look at some pictures and then you can go to bed."

"Come!" said Félix, "Suzanne shall look at the new picture post-cards Mamma has put in the album."

"Oh, yes," said the little girl.

Félix went and fetched the album. He took the child on his knee and Clémence came and sat on the arm of his chair. They turned the pages and the child delighted their hearts by the freshness of her questions, and her delight in their play, and the sureness of her sovereignty over her father and mother. . . . Soon her questions grew less eager, her little hands clutched the book less tightly, her head nodded and she fell asleep on her father's shoulder. . . . He was afraid of waking her by handing her over to the two women, and they stood smiling at his embarrassment. . . . Gently they took her from him and Clémence, feeling a little tired, held out her cheek to her



husband and the two women went out slowly with the child.

Félix stayed in his chair in front of the fire. It was too early for him to begin to work. . . . In the street outside all was silent. . . . About him was the dying noise of his household preparing for sleep, the closing of a door, the last flittings to and fro of the servants finishing their work. . . . With his chin in his hand and his eyes fixed on the flames he dreamed. . . . He thought of that queer little creature, the child, and the young woman, who were *his* child, his wife: the family that he had begotten. . . . He looked round at the study where he spent his life, at the tea which was made for him to drink during the night while he was sitting up alone: he marked the comfort of it all, the kind of return to his own element that he felt every evening when they left him and went to bed; was it all not a sufficient indication of his real nature—an old solitary student, a celibate philosopher? . . . And he

had founded a family! . . . And it was turning out very well. . . . He was very happy. . . . He could not do without them now. . . . How odd! . . .

He thought of how it had all come about. . . . It would soon be ten years ago now. . . . It had happened after a violent crisis of feeling—(How long ago that crisis seemed! It seemed impossible that a man could get into such a condition over a woman's whimperings!)—: he had just discovered the intellectual life—the real life of the intellect,—not the dallying with ideas that had been familiar to him as to all the men of his class on leaving college, not the fluttering of doctrines between a call and a dinner-party, but a passionate, permanent, exclusive possession, spending weeks together in unearthing a concept with never a thought for anything else—the fevered toil of such research, and the agony of being baffled, and the joys of triumph, and the breathless fructifying of one idea by another, with his whole being at stretch to discover whether such and

such an idea would beget such and such another or its opposite;—and he had just then discovered that such a life was his law, his order, the one thing that bound him to himself, his means of full self-realisation, and that every other kind of activity was for him a sham, a lie, boredom. . . . But at the same time he had discovered that if he was to have his intellectual life fully he must provide for the question of love; he must bring to an end the adventure which, however little sentimental it might be, took up his time, upset him, and, above all, forced him to be conscious in his love. . . . His mind demanded freedom from his body: the idea of marriage dogged him. . . . And he felt that it was impossible. . . .

True, it would be quite easy to find women who would let him work and would respect his independence, women who would not desire to monopolise “all his thoughts.” . . . But what kind of women? Little provincial misses, admirably brought up to be negative by their families or the priests, who

would not be embarrassing only because they were nothing. Or cold women. Or "intellectuals" with theories about mutual independence. Or a mystical woman, infatuated with self-sacrifice, who would force upon him the monstrous spectacle of a creature delighting in its own self-mutilation. . . . As for the woman he was seeking, a woman who would let him be quiet and would be neither negative nor inhuman, even supposing such an one existed, he had no reason to think that he would ever find her. . . .

And then he found her. . . . He found her during a stay with some friends, buried in an old country-house in Brittany, living with her father and younger brother, the very woman, one who was at the same time human, desirous of companionship and love and clearly tolerant of a man's liberty, not as a matter of "principle" (he had still to hear Clémence propound a "principle"), still less from any religious tenet or scruple (she was hardly at all pious), but from a sort of in-born diffidence before the inmost lives of

others, an instinctively aristocratic temperateness in her desire to taste the human soul. . . . He remembered the strange impression of reasonable tenderness that he had had at first sight of the tall girl with the clear affectionate expression in her eyes, and her sensitive laughing mouth and her fine healthy figure; she was gentle to all who surrounded her, and the fury of giving was entirely foreign to her; she was happy in her garden, but by no means greedy to "take nature to her bosom"; she delighted in art and every expression of the soul, but in measured expression, preferring Mozart to Schumann. . . . In everything she took up she was moderate, in everything she felt she was reasonable: to him she was as though she had strayed into the vulgar age, like one of those Greek figures, that with love in their hearts, skilfully weave their web with a golden shuttle. . . .

He had tried to test her and had revealed to her the fervour of the modern soul, the literature of "absolute" love (she had accepted the idea of the fact of love in the

spirit of the pagan virgins bathing the young warriors), the music of passionate conjunction, "the indiscriminate" "union of souls." . . . He watched her to see whether she would like these things and be false to her real nature! . . . But she did not even read through the books and she would close the music and begin to play by heart some "movement" of Schubert. . . .

Then one evening he spoke of a friend who had met the woman of his desire, and how his friend wished to live apart from the world and bury himself in abstract thought, so that he hesitated about offering so young a creature a share in such an austere life. . . . And, quite simply, she told him that she would accept such a life.

And he had married her. . . . And the marriage had made no change in him: she had proved herself the wife he had thought she would be: loving, never intruding, tranquil and collected in her love. . . . And then, delivered from chance, removed from the turbulence of the flesh, he had attained the ex-

alted life of the mind: and he had begun the composition of a great work.

Only on one evening—two years after their marriage; she used to sit near him, reading, while he worked—had she laid down her book and put her arms round his neck and said: “Why don’t you try to let me understand what you are doing?” And he had murmured: “It is very dry. . . . I am no good as a teacher.” Then she had turned away and sat down. . . . That was seven years ago. . . . She had never returned to the subject.

And she had desired a child. . . . They had had a child. . . . And she was an exquisite little creature, subtle, intelligent, bringing a note of youth and flowers into his rather grey life. . . .

So he had these two creatures in his life. And, living with them, never disturbed by them, he went on with his work. For a few hours every day he shared in their existence, but once he passed into his own room his life was his own and he could escape into his own

thoughts. . . . So he had realised the fabulous dream: the integrity of his own personality though he lived with a woman and a child, and the exalted life of the mind in the state of marriage. . . .

Sometimes, however, he would be oppressed by fear. . . . It seemed to him that there was a sort of legerdemain in his life. A man must pay for having taken to himself a family. . . . One day they would force themselves upon his attention and he would have to give his mind to the two creatures who were sleeping upstairs while he was working. . . . Bah! That was just the conclusion of a mathematician wanting life to be an exact equation! . . .

And now, as he stood by his fire, looking at his books, his papers, his drawers, his shelves, he began to think of his work, the strange intellectual activity to which, sitting alone in that room, he had devoted himself for almost ten years: the probing into his own thoughts, the sifting of his real thoughts



about great problems, the determination of his philosophic entity; and, at the same time,—as at every step he observed that what he believed to be thought was not thought, that the terms which he combined in his mind (the “simple” terms which need no definition because everybody is agreed about them) had at bottom no really clear meaning for him,—at the same time the analysis of the “simplest,” the most fundamental ideas of philosophic thought. . . . It was the work of his flesh and blood: nights and nights of fevered effort to make such and such a thought clear, to arrive at such and such a distinction. . . . And they say that analysis is a dead thing! It was a unique work, which no one had done at least with any firmness of purpose, which no one would do in the future since men have become contemptuous of pure ideas and taken to a pathetic philosophy, which things will only wax great in the democratic heaven. . . . And now he thought of what he had already done, of those elements of his ideas which he had already disentangled; his ideas about the

origin of the world and how its infinity was only the result of a taste—for the seduction of infinity;—his ideas about that Being which could only be thought of in terms of quality, and how impossible it was for a finite being to think such a thing. . . . Now he had come to the idea of movement; he would soon have established the two profoundly distinct ideas—of dynamism and continuity—which are confounded under one name. Then he would elucidate his ideas about the appearance of life, as to whether or no he thought it a discontinuity: and how discontinuity does not necessarily entail a miracle; his ideas concerning the appearance of the concept, the appearance of social feelings, and sympathy between human beings and how it has nothing to do with the return to God. . . . He would say all these things. He was still young. . . . He saw his work finished. . . . He dreamed of the day when, concerning all these great problems, while men were still wrangling because none of them at bottom really knew what he thought, he would say calmly: “On

that point I know perfectly clearly what I think; and if my ideas only originate in some preference, I know that too." And with all the might of his love and pride, as others hug their children or as the originators of great schemes hug the idea of their power, he hugged the idea of the work upon which he was engaged, wherein he should tell men to what a fierce desire to rise above his being to the idea of his being, to what a thirst for consciousness, to what a pitch of morality, one man had soared.

He threw a block of wood on the fire and plunged into his work. . . . And he gave hardly a thought to the woman and the child sleeping upstairs.

## II

IT was on a Sunday morning, on her way home from the Bois, that Suzanne first complained of a slight pain in her hip: it hurt her a little when she ran too fast, or went upstairs too quickly, or stood for too long. Oh! It did not hurt very much. . . . She complained again the next day. . . . A slight weakness in her knee. As a matter of form they sent for the doctor. He examined her, probed her, questioned her. . . . Then he said that it was nothing, just a growing-pain very common at her age, and advised them to keep her from running too much for the time being, and to make her lie down for a few hours every day, just for a few days. . . .

She lay down for two hours after lunch, every day. Then again towards the end of the day. She was very tractable and reasonable and gave up playing. . . . They took to

reading her stories and giving her pictures to look at. . . . And her little friends would come and see her. . . .

Félix used to come in at five and take tea with them. Then he would go back to his study, not without noticing that there was less noise in the passages.



. . . Félix had at last perfectly distinguished the two ideas of movement which were universally confounded. Now he was busy with the history of the confusion, showing the various forms which it had taken in the minds of the greatest thinkers. . . .

One night he had just finished a memoir of Descartes and had written several pages to expound the form the confusion had taken in his mind. . . .

Now, sunk deep in his arm-chair, in a dark corner of his study, he was drifting off into a

reverie about what he had been reading. . . . He thought of Descartes at the moment of his life when he had written his famous answer. . . . It was at the time when he had quarrelled with the Fathers of Clermont. He remembered the account of the quarrel in the biography: the philosopher's wrath because the Fathers had distorted his ideas in order to prove themselves right, as if he ought not to have remembered, said Baillet, that every master is obliged to forge chimæras for his pupils to give them practice in disputation. . . . It was at the time when he was preparing his Philosophy for publication. . . . It was also the year when he had lost his little girl, "his beloved Francine. . . ." Her death had given him, "the greatest sorrow he had ever felt in his life. . . . He wrote the story of Francine on the fly-leaf of a book. . . . He wept for her most tenderly. . . ." He visualised the great thinker, already an old man, bending over his dying child. . . . He liked—why?—the image of the suffering child, cradled in the verses of

a gentle poet on the death of a very dear little girl. . . . And, not without a certain pride, he thought of his own little girl, the charm of his life and work, smiling and happy, suffering a little for the moment, lying down to ward off a passing fatigue. . . . It would soon go. . . . He lingered over her image. . . . . . . . . . .

Suddenly an idea sprang to life in his mind, swamping every other: the idea that Suzanne was really ill: the pains in her hip, the weakness in her knees, were symptoms of hip-disease . . . the "growing-pains" were just the doctor's nonsense by way of reassuring the child's parents!

He leaped to his feet, took down an encyclopædia and feverishly turned over the pages. He read breathlessly, devouring the words. . . . Everything confirmed his fears. Each sentence as he read it forced him into certainty. It was as though the article had been written about Suzanne. . . . He did not finish it. He was certain. . . . Yes, yes. Of course: people always believe they have

every disease when they read about them. But sometimes they are right. . . . How could he for one moment have listened to the doctor's humbug? . . . But then, it was *inevitable* that she should be stricken down, that some great misfortune should come to him. It was a punishment for his egoism, for his monstrous life of the mind. His life for the past ten years had been a defiance of the laws of humanity. God was punishing him. It seemed to him that the bond of human love, the spiritual accord of those who were joined together and lived one for another, was rising about him, crying shame upon his life and demanding his expiation of it. . . . He was appalled by his certainty. . . . He did not know what he was doing. . . . He lit a lamp. . . . Why? . . . Because he wanted to go and look at his child, to gaze and gaze at her: he would see her, he would know. . . .

He went down the passage on tiptoe, seeing himself, with deep emotion, objectively, —a man walking through the darkness trembling for his sleeping dear ones, trembling



at the oppressive silence of the house, trembling at the thought of the dreadful stillness and tranquillity of those in the house who did not yet know. . . .

He entered the room. On a chair were her little garments neatly folded up: in an arm-chair were her favourite toys. . . . He went up to the bed, and, screening the light with his hands, he bent over the child, and trembled. She was asleep in her little bed as in a sanctuary, with her lips a little open, her breathing relaxed, her fists closed, seemingly deep in unconsciousness, as though she were gathering all her strength in absolute trust. . . . He almost swooned. . . . However, he pulled himself together, and, concentrating all his powers on the will to see and understand, as though he suddenly believed that the will to knowledge gives knowledge, he fixed his eyes on the sleeping child. . . . So he stood, bending over her. . . .

Then, for the first time, gradually he was overcome by a feeling that the little body lying there, pulsating with life, was his power

of living incarnate and become conscious, his zest for life, his will . . . ; himself living before his own eyes. . . . Then love wrought its miracle: slowly, gently, surely, the little sleeping thing that he felt to be himself swept him out of himself. . . . Slowly, deliciously, he felt every demarcation between himself and her being obliterated. . . . Everything in him that was properly or solely himself was blotted out, blotted out. . . . His desire for knowledge that had brought him to her bedside, his anxiety for the child, his suffering because of her and yet exterior to her, all had left him. . . . He had become one with the little sleeping creature, weak, trustful, sick. . . . Now it was she who suffered in him, she who in him pitied her: he felt with her and no longer because of her; his self-interest melted away in love. . . . And now the miracle was fully accomplished: he lived wholly in her. . . . But at the same time, strangely, it seemed to him that he had gained and grown in ceasing to be himself; it was as though his consciousness was reaching out,

reaching out, deliciously expanding, and at the same time finding self-denial in this expansion and extension; the more fully he attained consciousness, the more was his consciousness in her. . . . And he never wearied, could not conceive of wearying of this melting into her soul. . . . He blessed her for sleeping so that he could cleave to her undisturbedly, unreasoningly, boundlessly. . . . And he stood there, bending over her, tasting to the full the delight of this merging of his entity into hers. . . .

He stood up at last and his mind was as confused as a drunken man's. What was happening to him? . . . What! He had come with a very definite object. . . . What was this intoxication that had overcome him and still possessed him? . . . He looked round him to try to collect himself, to find his bearings again. . . . Yes, that was the door there . . . , the passage . . . , yonder his wife was sleeping. . . . His wife! The woman through whom he had begotten his child! . . . The woman whom he had impregnated

with his being . . . who, also, she too, was himself! . . . And once more he was intoxicated with the feeling that he was himself in another than himself.

Then he understood: his family was absorbing him; the entity which was his own was stripping him of the identity of his own being; his body was robbing him of his mind . . . then in a flash he saw his whole life crumbling away, his whole being confiscated by love, the activity of his intellect rendered impossible, all the ideas seething in him just left, for ever; his beloved work crushed in the embryo. . . . No. That should not be. . . . So much could not be asked of him. . . . If the child were ill, she would be looked after. He would do all that was necessary. . . . Surely his whole life, his happiness were not asked of him. . . . He would not love them. He would not. He would not. . . . So on a desperate defensive impulse, which instantly horrified him, he ran to his study, back to his writings and his ideas. These things were his life, his passion, his desire. They would be

his defence. And with a frenzy that terrified him, for he knew that his old frenzy was a passion which was slipping away from him, he plunged into his papers. . . .

But he read not a word. . . . He had never a thought. . . . And all the things he had written down seemed to him to be dead things. The only reality was yonder, in the child's room. . . . And already he found the limitation of himself in himself, which he had felt on reading a few lines, a heavy burden to bear.

Then he was seized with a feeling of dizziness: there was no doubt about it: it was the ruin of his intellect, the collapse of his dreams, a declension into the most violent, the richest, the most sorrowful love. . . . Then, as before, he was filled with a desire to wear out his agitation by movement, to go out, to run, to go walking blindly on and on. . . . But now he was compelled to stay, to stay with those whom he had created, for whom he was responsible. . . . And, in his heart of hearts, he wished to stay. He wished to suffer with

them; to stay, wounded by them, near those whom he had wounded. And, sinking back into his chair, he murmured with the Master: "I am crucified to the world, as the world in me is crucified. . . ."

And he sat there, waiting for the dawn, trying to think that it was all an evil dream, that to-morrow he would be told that all was well, that he would come back to himself; but, even so, he felt convinced that he would never be the same again, that he would love them, that he wished to love them, that he would never again recover the distinct sense of demarcation between himself and them, which only a few hours ago he had had as he sat at his desk. . . . And he looked at his papers—his worshipful effort to win to a clear idea of his being—which in one night had slipped back into the world of inanimate things. . . . What then was this passion of his for the idea? What was this "passion" which the mere sight of the lips of a sleeping child had been enough to dissipate? . . . And yet this passion was his, it was the first

condition of his existence, and he was conscious of the truth of his distress at the thought of losing it. . . .

And he sat there with bowed head, trembling in his impotence to understand what he was. . . . He understood then those who, under the stress of such a night of torment, fall on their knees before Him who knows. . . .



Day came. He hurried to the doctor's. . . . Hip-disease! He must be mad to think such a thing. . . . The diagnosis was very simple. . . . They would have told him the truth at once. . . . No, no. It was just the exhaustion of a child who has grown too fast. . . .

He went home. They were at breakfast. . . . He explained his lateness as best he could and made some story to account for his going out so early and sat down between them.

. . . He was filled with a profoundly new feeling for the two of them. As he looked at the little creature by his side, eating, drinking, talking, thinking, willing, how strangely he felt that it was himself living there by his side! . . . Ah! Often and often, in intellectual amusement, he had said to himself at meals as he looked at her: "Her life is really my life." But to-day he felt it! And it seemed to him that no father could feel it as he did. For other fathers it is only an idea. . . . And, as for the woman sitting opposite him, he was filled with a profound feeling this morning—a feeling such as he had never had (except perhaps once, when she was pregnant)—that she was a child whom he had taken away from her own people, her own home, her own consciousness, and that he had penetrated into her consciousness, and at the same time had been interpenetrated by her. . . . Oh! He had not been wrong that night; no, never again would he return to the sense of demarcation between himself and them that he had had yesterday, never again would



he win back to the independence of his consciousness, or the purity of his heart, or to the clarity of the heart which is necessary for the intellect. . . .

He spent the whole of the afternoon with Suzanne, making her play, and telling her stories. . . . Clémence watched him in amazement.

Next day, after lunch, he went into his study, intending to return to his work. . . . There was nothing to prevent him. . . . Come! What was the profound meaning of that page of Descartes? What was its significance in the master's scheme of thought at that particular period of his life? . . . He probed into it. . . . Yes, he carefully examined it. . . . As before. . . . He worked through to his idea, and he hugged it to him. . . . But he was fully aware that his real power of absorption and intensive concentration was no longer with his ideas, but, in the next room, directed upon the sofa where lay the flesh of his flesh, the blood of his blood.

. . . And feverishly he paced up and down and round his room; and he was conscious of the fact that his fever was not the fever of thought, but the fever of fear: that he was clinging to his love for his work, willing himself to will it, forcing himself to attach an importance to the idea shaping in his mind, and that now the smallest trifle was enough to distract him from it all. . . . And yet there was a profound something, very profound, but profound in a different way from his judgment, which bound him to his work. "Ah!" he wept in his heart, "It is too frightful, too appalling, in the full tide of life to be dispossessed of faith."

. . . He read the poem of an old writer: how, according to his school of thought, the world was made, the birth of the world, the grandeur of the sun, the movement of the stars, planets, and animals. . . . And from that he passed to the thought of the suffering of the child. And, tremblingly, he felt that

out of that had just welled his real power of interest. . . .

. . . That day several little friends had come to play with Suzanne and they had all romped about. Then came the time for Suzanne to lie down. She had been stopped at the most thrilling moment of the game, and the rest cruelly went on playing. And she looked at them with sad wisdom in her eyes. . . . Oh! How entirely he was filled with love, with the fierce joy of sharing, with a sudden added sense of being swept out of himself, with a feeling of the impotence of the mind! . . .



The disease gained ground. The doctors held a long consultation. . . . Men came with bands and cords and plaster to imprison the child's limbs in a monstrous sheath, while, in agony, horribly gay, her parents amused her and deceived her—"It is only for a few days.

Suzanne shall play again on Sunday"—and she looked up at them with her eyes wide in surprise and confidence. . . . And the men went away. And she was left there, crucified, resigned, terribly human. . . .

Then, rudely, violently torn away from his ideas, the unhappy man felt himself relapsing into the blindest, the most desperate love, the most utter devotion, the completest absorption of the heart that he had ever known. What was the fusion of himself with a suffering creature that he had known years ago and taken for a tremendous thing compared now with this fusion of himself with a creature who was his very being, blood of his blood, his will become flesh and suffering! Now it was through his inmost being, through the extension of his own nature, and not through any outward cause, that his soul had become one with the soul of another; it was the profoundest depths of himself, his uttermost self, that now projected him outside himself, bound him to another human being,

with the most marvellously perfect adjustment, the most wonderful adhesive power, the most complete alienation from himself! Ah! He knew now what it was to become one with another soul, with its most secret places, where almost it were impossible to believe that another soul could penetrate, and wholly to lose consciousness of self, the ultimate self, which marks the ultimate cleavage between one entity and another. . . . And now everything was crumbling, crumbling away: all his mental activity, all his power of taking and understanding. And he struggled: he tried to raise himself above this mighty sea of love, once more to hug to himself his beloved power of thought: twenty times a day he would go into his study and fling himself into his ideas—for he had, had he not?, still the right to desire his own life, his own happiness! Surely he had not to give everything!—And twenty times his ideas would elude him, like a piece of wreckage slipping away from his frozen fingers. And from his violent resistance, in despair at his

impotence, he would sink back into the fullness of his love.

And he detested his love. He found in it the things he most detested: the love of "human suffering," the love of "sensibility," the love of the flesh in travail. . . . And this love was the love of *his* flesh. . . . And all the love of man, and all man's "charity," and all that man sanctifies, were the love of his flesh . . . the love of his "kin and kind." . . . Ah! How subtle, how eternal is that religion which bids man seek his divinity in the adulation of his own suffering flesh upon the cross.

For that is what this Christian religion amounts to: it is Man's worship of his own suffering flesh. . . . It is because it is that that it has conquered the world and become universal. . . . And indeed there are men who have proclaimed Christ to be the greatest of "thinkers"<sup>1</sup> and declare that he would

<sup>1</sup> "Christum ait fuisse summum philosophum." (Tschirnhaus, on Spinoza.)

have been just as great without his crucifixion, and that he should be loved not only on Gerazim or Golgotha but in mind and truth. What men are these? Philosophers, learned men, "semi-Christians," who have no weight with the people or are ignored by them. . . . But "Pascal in sickness showing his sensibility of the physical sufferings of Jesus" is the true Christian, and all men cross themselves in him.

And his was the love of his flesh *wounded*. Oh! Could he hate the love of the One who suffered, the One who was buried and wounded, enough! Does not suffering mean feeling, compassion, feeling with another? Why should we always "feel *sorrow*"? By what blasphemy, by what base reduction of life to the level of your wretchedness have you decided that *human* means *suffering*? And you who are "compassionate," you who "commune" with your God, why must it always be communion in His sorrow? Why is there no communion in His smile, when He

was at Magdala, happy and simple in the company of the two young women? Why and through what sadism—I do not only mean you, the dreadful modern comedians, the exploiters of the quivering flesh, those who parade Sebastian and Amfortas, but you too, the stern doctors of the ages of restraint: “O blood that flowest from the pierced head, or from the galled eyes, or from the body bruised and broken! O precious blood, let me gather thee drop by drop . . .”<sup>1</sup>—through what sadism do you commune with the One who was broken and destroyed? . . . And he too, like all the rest, was a party to such sadism. Had he been one with his child when she was happy and playing about in the gardens? Had he even felt that he was kin with her in those days? Was it not also, in his case, the suffering human being that had called forth his pity? . . . With bowed head he thought: “Will ever a man be human enough wholly, in compassion, to share in happiness?”



And his was the love of a human being hurt and laid low *by himself*. For he was beginning to discover hideous feelings in himself: a delight in her suffering because it was his work, because it was the proof of his power to create suffering. . . . The horrible love of man for his power of cruelty. . . .

And suddenly he perceived the meaning of Christianity: the love of men for Him who had suffered not *for* them, but *through* them, who would never have suffered if they had not sinned. . . .

And love beset him on all sides: now, beneath states of soul which he thought "reasonable" he would suddenly recognise it; now, at the most unexpected places, new forms of love would spring up and close in upon him like furies.

Sometimes in his desire to feel himself alone, he would go as far as to visit the responsibility of her illness upon the child her-

self. It was madness to believe that he had done everything: the creation of a human being by itself without any reference to its ascendants—"autogenesis"—did exist! So much the worse for her if she had played her part in the creation of herself badly. . . . And at once—in addition to his horror of the solitude to which he was abandoning the little creature—he would become conscious of regret for the share in her creation which he had just granted her, of grudging her the smallest independence, of wishing her to be only, wholly and solely, himself. . . . And, in terror, he would see that his "responsibility" came not from his "reason" or his "morality" but from the most organic element of his being, from the instinctive desire to create, from some obscure and unknown need of carnal interest. . . . And he would be overwhelmed by the consciousness of a profound tie that bound him.

And, at such moments, he would not share his interest even with Clémence. He told himself that the father was the only begetter

and parent, that the man alone was responsible. . . . Ah! The wiseacres who declared that, if Eve alone had sinned, the human race would never have fallen, had seen deep into the human heart.

And he understood now the meaning of the desire for responsibility, the desire to reach consciousness remotely, entirely remote from self; and that the great responsible men are the men of power, of will, of force and action. . . . Those who live by weakness, women and children, have no desire for responsibility.

At other times, when he had once more become "reasonable," he would blame Clémence. The mother's nature also played its part in the shaping of the child! (And who knows whether among her kindred, whatever they may say, there may not be some taint or other?) . . . And it was she who had made the child: he remembered that now: it was her woman's passion, it was she. . . . No, no. It was he, it was he . . . . . And suddenly, as he looked at the child, he

knew that it was neither she nor he, but their indivisible bond, the mysterious union in which their separate individualities and wills were merged. . . . Then in a flash he began to understand why this mystery was made holy, and marriage a sacrament; he understood how and why it is monstrous for two wills which have created another being, the living symbol of their perfect conjunction, afterwards to be so bold as to declare themselves sundered, strangers to one another, divorced from one another. . . . And it seemed to him that yet another mystic bond, heightened by the splendour which men confer on it, a splendour which he had just begun to feel, had taken possession of his heart. . . .

He thought of the millions of human beings who recite these dogmas. . . . Their lives would become impossible if they began to feel them. . . .

And yet again he would sink back resolutely and utterly into consciousness of the evil he had done as though he wished to drain

it of its bitterness. As with a dagger he stabbed himself with this truth: "My will has produced this suffering creature. . . . It is false to say: I willed the existence of this creature. And afterwards it came to suffering. Rather must I say: At the moment when I willed her existence, through the fact of my willing it, she suffered. . . . My will, being this poor little creature, was a suffering thing. . . . I was, I am, suffering in her. . . ." So, in a roundabout way, he came back to the idea of communion; once more his responsibility was turned into love. . . . And he regretted his first feelings which did at least give him the right to believe in a certain amount of liberty. . . .

He would look down at the little creature who was revealing to him his own suffering. . . . It would seem to him that the Father adored the Son for having discovered for Him His own humanity. . . .

And yet, how bitterly, beneath such communion, did he feel the implacable independ-

ence of human creatures, and how impotent is a man to do anything for that other creature which is himself, which must yet work out its own salvation! . . . How the doctors hurt him merely by saying: "She will pull through"!

And at other times his "common sense" would intervene and declare that it was all literature, all metaphor, to talk about one consciousness merged with another and saying: "I am ill in your lungs"! . . . Could anything be more personal than consciousness? He was himself, alone. A being had issued from him which was another entity, entirely separate from himself. . . . But it was enough for him to give one glance at his child to know in his heart that he was both himself and she. . . . He would ponder long this state of his heart: to be both himself and not himself! . . . Then, fully, clearly, he would admit the frightful law of love: its frightful *contradiction*. Its frightful contradiction—the Idea's worst enemy;—he detested it and

seeing all men grovelling under it with their patheticism, their outpouring of emotion, their "musicality"; and it was there, firmly seated in himself, and he could feel it, while all the rest were gushing about it, all the professors of a Pascalian ecstasy, wretched scribblers, glued to their desks, thinking of nothing but their fame, while, never having loved any one, they had preserved their identity intact. . . . And he would think of the "Effect which is only a form of the Cause," and he would think of the Father "consubstantial" with the Son, of the three Persons who are but one Person, of all the things which are themselves and something other than themselves, to the eternal perplexity of men. And all their "follies" seemed to him to be very serious things. And the councils which debated them seemed to him to be sublime. . . . And he was entirely submerged by contradiction, now swollen with his past and the religion he had come by through it. . . .

And then, lost in this absolute contradic-

tion, this perfect dislocation from himself, he was entirely deserted by his power of thought. . . . Indeed it was still possible for him to observe, to read, to deduct; to approach ideas, to come in contact with their external form, to follow all the miserable processes which are called Intelligence, by way of crushing them. . . . But the real power of thought, the possession of the Idea, the occupation of it, the penetration to its inmost, the erethismus of the mind which men pretend to confuse with the emotion of the heart, and the quickened idea, the abstract made flesh (men believe that the abstract is a dead thing!), and the "grip" of which he was so proud, the fierce tension of the mind in its grasp of an idea, in holding it against the hundred ideas which would gather round it and try to beat him back, all these cherished powers of his were now for ever lost and submerged in the action of his heart. . . . And he saw them sinking. . . . And he knew how low he had fallen. Oh! He had so often in others girded at such impotence to grasp an



idea, such disparities of mind, such cowardice of thought, as were now his! . . . And the "liberal" style, as he had called it in his contempt, the style which leaves room for what it does not mean, the style which does not absolutely convey the thought behind it, would now be his if he were not too ashamed to write. . . .

And in his growing impotence, in face of the increasingly certain collapse of his work, overwhelmed with sorrow like the man who thought himself abandoned by his God—as he would have been if he had really believed—he cried aloud to the God whom he loved: "Why hast thou deserted me!" . . .

But he knew that he deserved such desertion, that he had committed a crime, that he was doomed. And, shuddering at his punishment, he took to heart the words of Science to the man who was damned and wept: "With the first dart thou shouldest raise thy eyes towards me, and not droop thy wings

and go out to meet the blows of some little girl or any other such small thing.”<sup>1</sup>

And, gazing back at the Eden which he was losing through his heart, he sighed: “Who shall deliver us from charity!”

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. . . He thought of the woman whom he had made to suffer in his youth, the woman whom he had loved so much. . . . He ventured to write to her. On several evenings he wandered round her house . . . :

“Madeleine. . . . Forgive me! . . . I wanted to see you again. . . . Only for a moment. . . . I am very unhappy. . . . My child is ill. . . . I understand now all the suffering I caused you. . . . How is your boy, Pierre? . . .”

She listened, silent and reserved. . . . She remembered the crumbling away of the dream she had made with him, and in the bitterness

<sup>1</sup> Dante, *Purgatorio*, xxxi. 55.

of her heart there was no room for pity for others. . . . She said a few commonplace words, broke off their conversation, and almost lightly walked back towards her home, which at least had not betrayed her. . . .



They went to Berck. He marked the child's distress when she found that there existed a whole world of little people like herself all strapped down to their carriages; and how, suddenly, her disease became a solemn thing to her, and how horribly conscious she became of being subject to a definite disease, and the object of so many words, so many consultations, an illness so frequent that a place had been consecrated to it, and so serious that her parents had to leave their affairs for a long time . . . ; and her realisation, horrible to see, that she was now more firmly strapped to her bed, and her new expression, as of her inmost soul gazing through at them. . . . And in face of this renewed crucifixion he suffered a wild acces-

sion of love, of removal from himself, an orgy of communion. . . .

And in that perfect unity, through its very perfection, he tried to liberate himself. . . . He had the right to despise what he felt to be himself, his own flesh and its mutilation! He had the right to dispose of himself! . . . But at once the image of the child would arise before him, separate from him, with a soul of her own, lacerated and broken by such desertion. . . . Ah, yes! She ceases to be herself if I think of her in myself, but she becomes herself again when I try to dispose of myself. . . . We are one, but we are two. . . .

And once more the unhappy wretch who desired nothing but a clear idea, would sink back into the absolute contradiction, of which he had the most horribly clear idea.

And there was much more to torture him! The complaisance of these people in the things he detested, the things which dragged

him down. . . . Their complacent acceptance of suffering. . . . The litters put side by side—the little cripples laughing and playing together—and their parents reading gently the while, or sewing, or drinking tea or playing cards. . . . Their acceptance of misfortune. . . . Their acquiescence in degradation. . . . Acquiescence, do I say? . . . Their pride. . . . Their feeling of being a corporate entity, of being humanity, “moral” humanity, the only kind of humanity deserving of interest! Their silent contempt for healthy humanity, for those whose children thrive and go and make holiday happily by the sea! . . . The arrogance of unhappiness. . . . And their comfortable delight in living only through the heart: their hatred of those who keep to themselves, their hatred of those who think. . . . Their pretension that the loftiest thoughts are not the equal of the love which they expend on their children. . . . And their familiarity with himself, their belief that he was like themselves.

They were symbolical to him of the mod-

ern world, of what the world has been for two thousand years. . . . The religion of the heart, of sentiment, of tears. . . . The pyre of the Idea. . . . Of course! A moral atmosphere entirely created by women! Ah! How great was the ancient agony: "Away with women," He said to His disciples. And then when they burst into tears: "It is not worth while getting rid of women to avoid these inconveniences. . . ." And to think of the modern agony: women at the foot of a cross! . . . Women. . . . Women everywhere. . . . All the ordering of the soul left to women. And then the heart, the heart, always and everywhere the heart. Art turned to "sentiment." Justice turned to "love." Morality turned to "kindness." . . . So that, if a man were alone in the world, he could not be moral. . . . This thing reaches even unto God, who is a heart, for their Jesus Christ comes from the heart of God, from the heart of His Father; only with the great pagans do the children of the Gods arise from their father's brain! . . .

And now, in this new accession of love, in the renewed exactions of his heart, even a superficial grasp of ideas became impossible for him, and the last remaining powers of his mind surrendered. Like a father in despair hugging to his breast a slowly dying child whom he adores, and covering it with mad kisses, he would for hours together wander about the dunes, fiercely clinging to the idea of the old life which had been his joy and his pride, and was now vanishing for ever. . . . Oh! The days spent wholly in development: the joy of being conscious of seeing clearly, of seeing more and more clearly, of making everything distinct and ordered, of God-like calling forth light out of darkness, and order out of chaos; and of understanding the disturbance of the heart, which others are content to feel—and their anger at being understood, and their denials: “The heart has its reasons” . . . as if it were impossible to know them!—; the joy in such consciousness of slowly, surely, breaking away from other men and creating another

species. . . . All that was gone from him for ever! . . . And, instead of it, he had only love, the adoration of his own flesh, the debauch of his own heart. . . . Love, to which all men may come. . . . Love, in which the basest are the most apt . . . with their dreadful sophistry in assuring us that love is light, that love is developement. . . . That love has led to the creation of the greatest works! As if it were not the truth that those who created them did so when they had passed beyond love, and had won back to mastery of themselves in order to reflect upon their love. As if love, by itself, had ever discovered anything! . . . And they say that love purifies! That love uplifts! As if it did not uplift exactly in proportion as it ceases to be love and is tinged with ideas. . . . Love, by which I live without understanding my life. . . . Love, which ceases to be love as soon as it attains self-knowledge and self-judgment. . . . Love, which brings us back to "tendency," to blind will, to the "vital impulse." . . . Love, which drags us down to the level



of the beasts. . . . Love, which degrades us. . . . And it is all very fine for me to hurl insults at love, since even as I do so I sink deeper into it than ever, since, no sooner do I know that my child is awake than breathlessly I hasten to her bed, to catch and absorb her first thought. . . . Are you satisfied, ye brutish lovers? For I know your malicious delight, I know your abominable sniggering. —“He is not so bad as all that. . . . He is no different from the rest. . . . At heart he is a sentimentalist . . .”—whenever Intelligence falls headlong into the mire in which you are all wallowing. . . .

And he would rush back to the house, drunk with love, and hate, and despair at his downfall. . . .



And there lay in wait for him aggravations of love which he had not foreseen and which grew greater every day; from day to day the

child became more human, more purely a soul, passing beyond mere feeling and rising to moral suffering: and the more the little creature became a human creature, the more profoundly she would touch his heart, and the more strongly she would draw him to herself. . . . But how he wept over her precocious humanity! . . .

. . . They were in the garden. The sun was sinking over the still sea and night was slowly veiling the earth as with a shroud of darkness. In the distance they could hear the faint sound of the waves heaving gently up and dying at the foot of the dunes, as though they were worn out by the heat of the day. On the road the cattle were being driven home, wearied by the long heat, longing for shade and rest. . . . Everything was drooping and faint, overcome: sounds, scents, colours. . . . Ah! How she sank into the death of the day, the abjuration of things. . . . How keenly she felt the languor of nature, which she at least did not put to shame. . . .

How clear it was to see that her eyes, gazing into space, ignored the amusement of form, and went straight, searchingly, to meet the soul of things. . . . And, how mightily, as he sat by her side there in the shadow, how mightily, with what utter oblation, what votive purity, he was wedded to her soul, a soul of such solemn serenity. . . .

One evening Clémence had gone to the piano. The litter had been brought up and the child was listening in her father's arms. . . . Clémence went through a few romantic pieces, and then she opened a volume of Beethoven and began the largo of the Fourth Sonata. . . . Félix gazed at the child. How solemnly she listened! How indifferent she was to the movement of the fingers, the working of the hands, to the obvious things, the sudden flashes and decorative passages! She was entirely indifferent to the sound, and wholly absorbed in the soul which they expressed! And, during the great passages which demand the closest attention from many grown men

and women, her heart would follow as though it desired to grasp their full achievement; their profoundest development, their final attainment of peace. . . . And now Clémence reached a sort of exaltation; she played by heart with consummate expression. . . . The child's eyes saw nothing now; she did not even hear the notes and chords, but was terribly absorbed, as though she had reached out to meet the soul which had created the music to tell the sorrow of mutilation and laceration. . . . Then, through the broken rhythms, the breathlessness, the interrogations, the changes of key, which might have distracted and disturbed her, he saw her following the soul of the music and with a tear melting into its ultimate feeling: consolation through the inward life. . . . Then, as he bent over her, he cleaved to her soul, so tragically human, in an agony of hunger for something he had never yet known. . . .



The child had been lying for nearly a year so bound and shackled. . . . Came a day when the doctors were to come to see if they could release her. . . . They removed her bonds, made her stand up and walk. Standing side by side her father and mother watched the expression on the doctors' faces. The servants did not leave the room. . . . Very seriously the doctors examined the child, and all those present trembled lest they should not yet be able to consent to the child's release. . . . The doctors exchanged a few whispered words. . . . Félix understood; all was lost. . . . "Still a little patience." . . . Horrible words of encouragement. . . . The child was laid on the bed again. . . . There was silence.

They had dinner. . . . They tried to maintain their usual demeanour. . . .

He let Clémence go to bed and then went into his study. . . . For some time he kept control of himself: he read and wrote. . . . He walked about the room clutching at the

semblance of hope. . . . Then he thought that he was alone, that everybody was asleep, that he was free . . . ; then, sinking into his chair, he laid his arms on the table and hid his face in them, and let loose the flood of his mighty grief. . . . He wept in the despair of his love, and through his tears he murmured: "Poor little Suzanne, poor little Suzanne. . . ." And his grief was heightened by being given rein. . . . He wept and wept. . . .

Suddenly he shivered: a hand was laid on his shoulder. He raised his head. It was Clémence. . . . She was standing by his side in her white dressing-gown, gazing into his eyes with a long pleading look, infinitely profound, and big with reproach and love and the desire to bring consolation. . . .

"Félix," she said softly, restraining her emotion, "why don't you tell me of your suffering? . . . Your grief is breaking my heart. . . . I feel that I could ease and assuage it for you. . . ."

He bowed his head, and gulped for breath,

and avoided her eyes, like a beast at bay. . . . He was consternated by her presence there: not once during the eleven years of their life together under the same roof, had she violated his nightly retreat where she knew that he withdrew into himself. Not one night had she come. And there she stood! . . . And it was she, she whom for eleven years he had kept at a distance, whom he had harshly repelled one day when she had come to him in a burst of confidence—surely she remembered it—it was she who had now come to offer to share in his grief! . . . She must be very sure, to have dared to do so, sure that he was weak and ripe for surrender. . . . He felt her hand on his shoulder, loving, firm, intent upon tenderness. . . . She had watched him. . . . Worst of all, she was right in her certainty; he desired the communion, the right to share, which she had come to wrest from him; he longed to lay bare his fatherly grief in the arms of his accomplice, to weep over his child in the arms in which he had begotten her, to complete in the arms of the

mother the alienation of his being in those who were his being. She had done well to come. He was expecting her. . . . And, desperately, he felt that the last rampart of his identity was crumbling away at her coming and also that he was glad of it. . . .

His first impulse was to shrink back, and he dried his tears and murmured:

“It was a moment of weakness. . . . I gave way . . . gave way . . . weakly. . . . It will pass. . . . I shall be strong. . . .”

She was brave enough to persist. Tremblingly she stooped affectionately over him and said:

“You know, you often say that I too am strong . . . a ‘child of the fields’ . . . that I don’t suffer from nerves like you. . . . Do you think I could not bear your grief with you? . . .”

“Yes. . . . You are brave . . .,” he said, putting his arm round her waist. “You always show a bold front. . . . But, though



you are able to contain your grief . . . , yet you suffer none the less. . . . I can see that . . . and it is shameful of me to add to what you have to bear. . . .”

She came nearer to him and said:

“And you often say that I can see things more clearly than you . . . , that I see things as they are. . . . I am sure you are seeing more trouble than there is. . . . Did you think she would be able to get up to-day . . . ? . . . But I agree that it is very sad that we should have to wait for another six months. . . .”

“Six months!”—All his sorrow came back to him now, he could no longer contain it, and, having found a meet channel for it, he let it loose in full flood—“Six months! Do you think I am to be taken in by what they say? Do you think I didn’t see the way in which they looked at each other? Their anxious manner? That there is no improvement? Do you want me to believe that you did not see it too? . . . Did you not see how, this evening, our little darling, who has al-

ways been so gentle, so terribly considerate, in trying to hide her suffering from us—did you not see how she tried to be gay and cheerful?—because she sees that it hurts us too much, because we are not strong enough to hide our suffering from her. . . . Don't you find something horrible in a child of her age being as human as that? . . . Six months! . . . She will spend years cooped up like that. . . . Years. . . . And when she is released, she will be a cripple. . . . And then, however much we watch over her, and take care of her, and thrust aside everything that might hurt her, her life will be a thing of constant grief, from one moment to another. . . . Think of her in the gardens. . . . Yes, I know. People are human and will tell their children: 'You must not refuse to play with little Suzanne because she is a cripple.' And they will let her take part in their games 'like any other child,' considerately. . . . Children are like us: it gives them a moment's flattery not to be brutal. . . . Then they will suddenly begin a running game—

children always run—they will run races, ‘who’ll get there first?’ . . . And she will be in their way. . . . And they will make her feel it. . . . And she will cry. . . . And then think of the children’s parties. . . . Oh! She will dance too! . . . The bigger girls will come and dance with her, and they will make room for her in the round dances. . . . But when they get excited, and lose their heads and become really gay, when all the children begin to feel that they are moving in a giddy whirligig, going faster and faster, wilder and wilder, a crazy whirligig of which they are to be the creators and the creatures, when they reach a triumphant height of mastery, then she will creep out of the whirling throng, and she will come and sit by us and watch them, and she will say nothing, so as not to hurt us and we too will talk of something else. . . .”

“Stop, stop,” cried Clémence, holding him pressed close to her, and weeping. “You are breaking my heart. . . .”

But implacably he went on, torturing her,

making her his own, impregnating her with his fatherly grief:

“But all that is nothing. . . . The worst is yet to come, when she sees her girl friends disappear one by one down the paths in the gardens, hand in hand with their lovers, meeting in trust and love and troth-plight. . . . Oh! Think of the niceness and the elaborate care with which her friends will come and tell her of their joys. . . . And they will never be able to conceal their joy. . . . And she will have to rejoice with them. . . . And she too will have longed to give her life in trust and love: she too might have been able to win a lover’s pledge, to leave her home, plight her troth and cleave to her lover. . . . But men will not marry an invalid. . . . And she will go to the houses of her young married friends. She will be intimate with them. She will be their friend, their real friend, the friend of whom none of them will be afraid, the friend to whom they will ‘tell everything’—except the ultimate secrets of womanhood and marriage. . . . And she will

see their nurseries and their lovely children sleeping. . . . And she will think of the children she might have had, and how she would have loved them. . . . It will be her lot to nurse the children of other women. . . .”

“Stop, stop.”

“And we two will still be by her side to stay her hurt, to give her the illusion of love. . . . But when we are gone, she will be left all alone by the fireside, with some old maid, with nothing left, with no interest in the world. . . . Hers will have been a life of unbroken misery, humiliation, absolute negation. . . . And we shall be responsible for it. . . .”

Then he burst out sobbing and let his head fall on Clémence's bosom: he clung to her, pressed close, body to body, they who together had brought this misery to pass and together wept over it; and he felt in that embrace, and in the warm response she made, that everything that yet remained distinct and clear in him, the last vestiges of his liberty and his intellect, melted away; he clung

to her in the frenzy of his supreme surrender, and drank his fill of self-forgetfulness. And she, even as she wept over the picture he had drawn for her, pressed his dear head against her heart, holding him so for the first time, for the first time knowing that he was hers: broken and in despair she knew not whether her tears came from her sorrow as a mother or from her happiness as a wife; through her sobs she thought of the wasted days, and like another wife finding her husband again in the evening of her youth, she cried from the depths of her heart: "God has not suffered us to enjoy together the days of our youth." . . . They stood so for a long time, weeping, clasped in each other's arms, feeling the impiety of meeting in such a passionate embrace through the sufferings of their child. . . .

Their emotion ebbed. . . . Keeping her arm round her husband's neck, gently slipping away from his embrace, she sat down on the arm of the chair. She took up the handkerchief which he had left on his desk

and, mopping her eyes with it, she said through her tears:

“How cruel you are. . . . And how you exaggerate. . . . You seem to take a delight in hurting us. . . . How do you know that she will be a cripple? . . . And even if she were, . . . it would only be very slight. . . . Very slight. . . . She will meet with humiliation! Other people meet with it too, each after their kind . . . , because they are ugly . . . , because they are poor . . . , and their humiliation may be worse than hers. . . . She will have a lovely face . . . , she will be a charming girl. . . . Just think how people love her: strangers . . . , servants . . . , everybody. . . . Did you ever know a charming creature not be loved because she is slightly crippled? . . . You are always living in theories. . . .”

He listened to her and his being melted into hers. . . . What she was saying was the ruin of all that he respected; it was the acceptance of happiness in mutilation, the acceptance of the relative. . . . He let her go

on and offered no further resistance. . . . She dried the last vestiges of her tears and went on:

“ Besides . . . I don’t understand you. . . . You sit there considering the child’s life and you attach certain names to it . . . , names which hurt you horribly: humiliation, negation! . . . Why do you always want to find names for things? Why do you always want to judge everything? . . . ”

“ It is true,” he muttered. “ That is our mania, the obsession from which we ‘ think-ers ’ suffer. . . . ”

But this perpetual substitution of the idea for the reality was also his greatness. He knew that. . . . And he renounced his greatness.—“ I am not like that. . . . I take her life quite humbly, without asking what it is. . . . Every day I try to bring the dear child a little happiness. . . . And next day, too, if I can, I try again. . . . Believe me. Help her instead of judging her. . . . Come. Yesterday I read about a toy that would give her pleasure. . . . I went to Paris and



bought it. . . . Come, let us go and put it on her bed, so that she may smile when she wakes up. . . . To-morrow we will find something else. . . .”

She led him towards her room. He followed her tottering like a drunken man, with a confused consciousness of the immensity of his fall, and of sinking, sinking into reality . . . , into the narrow confines of family life. . . . She took a large plush bear out of a cardboard box. . . . Then they crept along the passage . . . and stole up to the child's bedside. . . . She held his hand, as if to support him in this approach of love, unprotected by pride. . . . So they stood, bending over the child. . . . She opened her eyes, saw the toy and the two of them standing there close together, looking at her, beseeching her, imploring her. . . . She smiled at them in forgiveness. . . .



From that day on he gave up the struggle. He was entirely filled with love, aban-

doned thought and every exercise of the mind. . . .

He neither despised nor honoured his surrender of these things, for he had so utterly fallen that he had sworn henceforth never to seek knowledge, and to live his life without judging it.

Sometimes in the newspapers or in conversation he would hap on the words "evolution," or God, or "liberty." . . . And would think: "I used to have ideas about these things, about the ideas of these things. . . . It is no good thinking about them! . . ."

Often, as he looked at Suzanne, he would think of that "desire" in him which had become a "thing," and that "tendency" which had become "flesh." . . . And he would discover in his mind a new delight in those "mysterious" things, before which a man can only stand amazed, and towards which the mind of its very essence cannot approach. He accepted his downfall.

Sometimes, as he watched Clémence—sitting enigmatically with the corners of her mouth turned up, so serene now in her happiness with Suzanne and himself—he would begin to think that she was secretly glad of the child's illness which had brought her husband back to her and robbed him of his intellect. . . . And he bore her no ill-will.

They returned to Berck. . . . He could now tolerate the people there. . . . He was amazed to find himself thinking that sickness and disease comprised humanity, and how

*The infinite sadness of Golgotha's bitter cry  
Had in itself contained sufficient agony  
To express humanity!*

. . . They were talking one day of a discovery which might transform the whole of man's ideas concerning the nature of matter.

"All that sort of thing," said the father of one of the children to Félix, "is not worth a kiss from one of these little people! . . ."

"No doubt," he said, "no doubt. . . ."

### III

WITH her delicate profile turned towards him, sitting under the light of the lamp, Clémence was plying her needle. On the other side of the table, biting her lip, busily drawing lines with her ruler—she had been two years at school—Suzanne was “doing her lessons.” And at the back of the room, in the shadow, sunk deep in his chair, Félix was watching them. . . . After all, the child was happy. . . . Most of the sufferings inherent in her infirmity had been abolished by the tenderness he gave her, by the subtle skill in consolation which he found in his love for her. . . . He would be able also to wipe out the sufferings that lay in wait for the child as she grew older. . . . He would find the right words to say. . . . He would live long enough to be able to help her through to an age when no more trials would lie before her. . . . And Clémence also was happy in the close affec-

tion which he now gave her. . . . It was a fine thing that he had done, or would have done, to have created happiness for these two, and the atmosphere of charity in which he now lay at his ease. . . . It was beautiful. . . . It was not only sweet. It was beautiful. . . . Beautiful. . . . So he had at last reached the love which had entirely absorbed him; he had reached the point, not only of living sweetly in that love, unresistingly and without regret, but also of admiring and honouring it. . . . So then he would no longer live his life without daring to consider it, but would find purpose and order in his being, the conjunction of his soul in the life he was living. . . .

So, fortified by the peace of it all, in his heart he suffered a supreme hope to spring into being; the hope that the old life of the mind, which he had worshipped and had so bitterly deplored, would now, from the lofty height of his love, be scorned and seen to be base and ugly. . . . If that could be, then he would find consummate peace. . . .

Then, for the first time for two years, he ventured to call to mind his old way of living, when he used to leave them in the evening and go and work. . . . Trembling like a sick man just risen from his bed, he began slowly to discover these relics of his heart; he saw himself after dinner, kissing them both on the brow and then going back into his study to be alone with himself, unveiling his thought, rising from his being to the idea of his being. . . . And it all seemed beautiful to him. . . . But he wished to flout it . . . ; and now he called to mind the vision of a life which would have consisted in pursuing that existence in spite of the child's illness, leaving the two women to their misery, throwing them a kind word now and then, then withdrawing into his own life, keeping his heart intact, and still soaring from Being into Consciousness. . . . Ah! Such a life would have been odious. . . . But he did not flout it. . . . And now he felt that in his heart of hearts he thought it more beautiful, more courageous, more holy. . . .

He wrestled with himself. . . . Yes. It would have been more beautiful to leave all that misery for the study of *Ethics* or *Criticism*. . . . But what had he to gain by doing so? . . . But he knew that it is the effort of thinking and not its success which is comely in the sight of the God he honoured. . . .

And he wrestled with himself. . . . What! Should he have left the two unhappy creatures alone in their misery, and deprived them of the smile which he could bring to their faces by doing so little, merely by staying with them! . . . But he felt, in the torment which he suffered at the idea of leaving them, that that would have been the real sacrifice and that he had only done what he preferred. . . .

Then he abandoned his resistance; accepting the sorrowful consciousness of his love for what he now knew to be lost for ever, in his heart he suffered to spring forth the worship that was welling up in it of the life wherein the mind would have triumphed over love. And from the profoundest and most religious depths of his being, not with the fervour with

which a man embraces the creatures of his blood, but with that different and deep-seated fervour with which a man cleaves to those who are of his moral race, he took to his heart, knowing that he would see them no more, the few rare men he could find, who through the ages had really broken free of all human love and had burned for the Idea; such men as you, O mighty thinkers of Greece, not you, who, strolling in pleasant gardens, discourse amiably of things human, the only subject of your conversations, in the sweet humours of friendship, but you, O mighty solitaires, who, dead to the world in your towers in Crete and Sicily, scan the nature of Numbers and Movement; and you, O great thinker of Rome, from your birth dedicated to all the joys of the heart, and yet in the darkness pondering upon the nature of things; and you, O Master of Ravenna, communing with him whom neither the love of a son nor the tears of his Penelope could keep from his desire to stride through the world and knowledge; and you, above all, O



great monks,—not you, the great men of prayer, swooning away in your cloistered cells over the wounds of a human body, not you, the consolers and comforters, drinking human love from the lips of the dying, nor you, the gossellers and preachers, fiercely and in joy striving to mould the human race . . . , but you, O great contemplatives, living alone in your cells at Oxford or Constance, brotherless, without penitents, or poor, or disciples, truly dead to all “created love,” whose Faith, unacquainted with Charity, sought ever the meaning of God and not His love. . . . And I have failed to become one of you! . . . I have fallen into the toils of the flesh. . . . I have loved my child, even as the beasts of the forest, even as the beasts of the field. . . . And now all is at an end. . . . Even my worship of you will leave me. . . . To-morrow I shall only be a thing that loves. . . .”

The child for some moments past had been sitting on his knee. . . . And as he chanted

inwardly his hymn to the God of the Idea, he pressed her to his heart with an embrace, a warmth that seemed to him to come from his desire to protect her from the vengeance of the God whom he was deriding, while it came indeed from his desire to associate with his misery the creature whom in all the world he loved the most. . . . So he sat, bending over his beloved burden, gazing upward to the heaven of the elect from which she had driven him, the heaven which he would never enter, the heaven which would soon be for ever hidden from his sight. . . . All there were silent. . . . Clémence smiled and went on with her sewing. . . . Slowly, with her eyes cast down, in a penetrating voice that seemed to come from far away, the child said: "Father, what are you thinking?"

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

(TO THE 13TH FRENCH EDITION)

AMONG the criticisms of this book there has been one so unanimous that it is impossible for me to refrain from meeting it.

This criticism is directed towards the second part and, in substance, amounts to this: I am told that the conflict I have set up between intellectual activity and the life of the heart, and my declaration of the impossibility of their co-existence, is purely arbitrary, artificial, "contrived," and that it is quite possible to live an intellectual life and at the same time to love a sick child, etc., etc. . . .

My answer is simple and brief: Such criticism is a condemnation of half-pressure intellectual activity and what I was dealing with was intellectual activity at the highest pressure.

It is very sure that half-pressure intellectual activity—like that of most of our doctors, lawyers, professors (to accept the examples produced for my benefit)—is compatible with love for a sick child. (But even so, such a love must not be too violent.)

Obviously every one will admit that intellectual activity at the highest pressure—like that of a seeker, or an active contemplation of any kind—demands the entire absorption of the soul wherein it dwells and cannot co-exist with any passion of the heart. Now, let me say again, that it is this and no other kind of intellectual activity which I have here treated.

One of my critics (in the *Action Française*, 15 December, 1912) declares that as a student of philosophy he indulges in a certain amount of mental activity concerning philosophic questions and fails to see why it should disappear because of some illness befalling one of his children. . . . I am perfectly willing to believe that the philosophic activity of this excellent person is compatible with love for a sick child: but of such I have not written.

May I be permitted to recall the words in which I defined my hero's mental application? (Page 100): "He had just discovered the intellectual life—the real life of the intellect,—not the dallying with ideas that had been familiar to him as to all the men of his class on leaving college, not the fluttering of doctrines between a call and a dinner-party, but a passionate, permanent, exclusive possession, spending weeks together in unearthing a concept, with never a thought for anything else—the fevered toil

of such research, and the agony of being baffled, and the joys of triumph, and the breathless fructifying of one idea by another, with his whole being at stretch to discover whether such and such an idea would beget such and such another or its opposite." And again (page 138): "Indeed it was still possible for him to observe, to read, to deduct; to approach ideas, to come in contact with their external form, to follow all the miserable processes which are called Intelligence, by way of crushing them. . . . But the real power of thought, the possession of the Idea, the occupation of it, the penetration to its inmost, the erethismus of the mind which men pretend to confuse with the emotion of the heart, and the quickened idea, the abstract made flesh, and the 'grip' of which he was so proud, the fierce tension of the mind in its grasp of an idea, in holding it against the hundred ideas which would gather round it and try to beat him back, all these cherished powers of his were now for ever lost and submerged in the action of his heart. . . ." Dare I also remind my critics that the problems attacked by my hero (page 106 ff.; the distinction between two ideas of movement confounded under one appellation, the distinction between the idea of the miraculous and the idea of the discontinuous, etc. . . .) are not, as certain

persons (for whom there is every excuse in their scant knowledge of these things) have said, "scraps of college jargon" or "pages from text-books," but questions which are left *unconsidered* for the very good reason that the mind which tackles them must of necessity rise to a really *inventive* activity? That should be enough, to my way of thinking, to make every sincere reader agree that the intellectual activity here in question is of the kind which demands the supremest concentration and tension from the man who is possessed by it and cannot fail to disappear when his soul is absorbed by another passion.<sup>1</sup>

These passages also seem to me to meet the reproach which has been levelled at my work that I admit of no degrees in the activity of the mind and refuse to allow Félix, after he has been seduced by his love for his child, to return, in a less degree, to that activity; but when it is remembered that we

<sup>1</sup> Some of the critics, let me hasten to say, have understood this perfectly: "Can a man," says M. Léon Werter, "at once love his daughter and systematically seek the truth? No. Not if he is possessed by an absolute and carnal love for the abstract." And the same critic on this point quotes the words of Mme. Périer about her brother, Blaise Pascal: "So it was that he made it plain that there was nothing to bind him to those he loved . . . and that we did not see that in cherishing and suffering such ties we were occupying a heart which should belong to God alone."

are dealing here with *inventive* activity, I am inclined to think that every one will agree that there can be no question of degrees. Of course it is understood that Félix would be able to go on reading and taking notes and being interested in problems, and that he might even produce pleasant little accounts of his studies and agreeable review articles; but such activity as that is by no means a "degree" of his former activity, nor will it in any way soften, but must rather accentuate, his lasting grief at the loss of it. . . . Finally, it is also admitted that, as I have been assured, if his intellectual passion had really been so strong, it would master his love and he would go on with his work: but his passion is not strong enough, as is made perfectly clear ("I have not been able to become one of you."), and it is precisely in that failure that the drama consists.

And now I am not so simple as to believe that I shall disarm my adversaries by pointing out to them that we are here dealing with intellectual passion. On the contrary, I am persuaded that it is precisely because I have described this singularly unpopular passion<sup>1</sup> that I have incurred their hos-

<sup>1</sup> One of the forms which this unpopularity takes is the branding of intellectual passion by calling it *absolutism* and *intolerance*, terms which in these days are so generously lavished upon passion of any kind.

tility, except it is because I have described my hero's religious worship of the passion which slips away from him. It may be the only merit of this book that it has brought into the clear light of day the extraordinary detestation which nowadays is felt for the religion of the mind, and that an author who has delighted in its description is therefore, in this year of grace, treated by supposedly cultured people as though he had written an apologia of robbery or murder.







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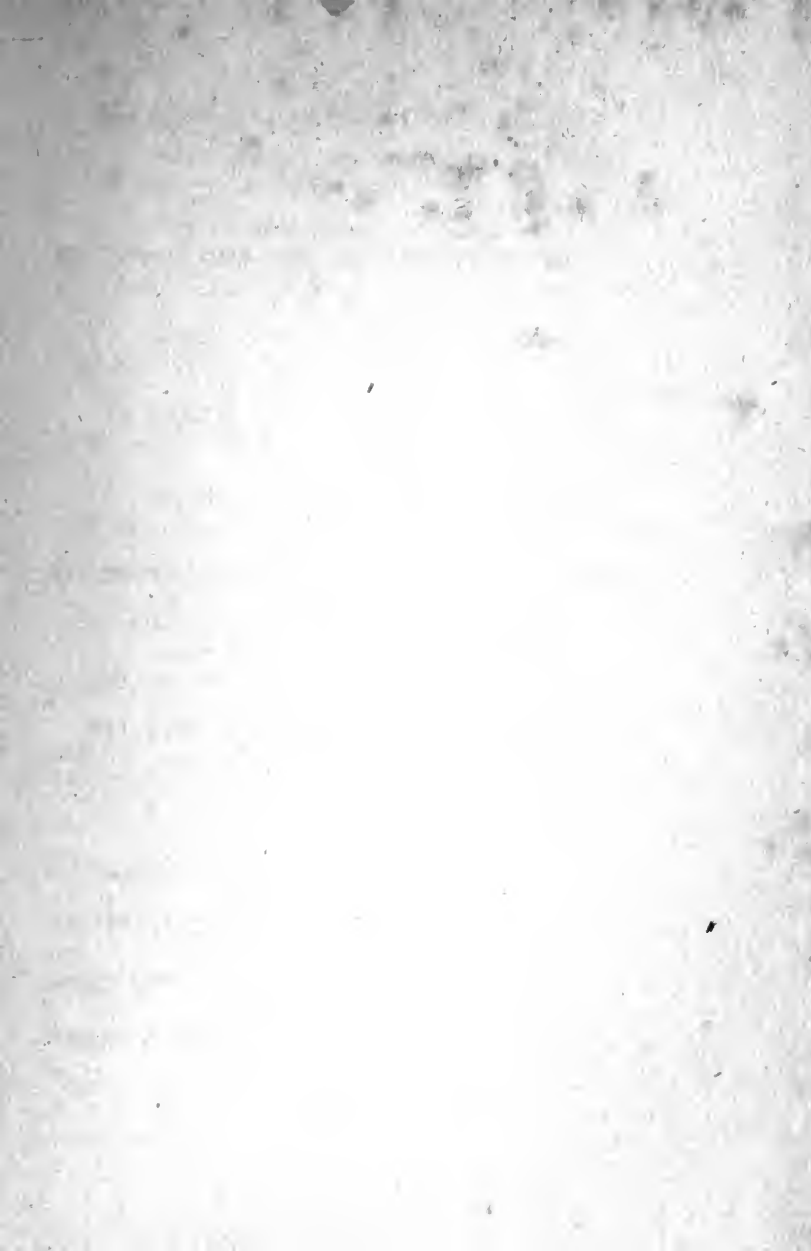
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